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PR

DECEMBER, 1948

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STEPHEN SPENDER
The Life of Literature (II)

ELEANOR CLARK
The Heart of the Afternoon (a story)

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Does Existentialism Still Exist?

ANTHONY BOWER
A View of Sir Osbert Sitwell

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DECEMBER, 1948 VOLUME XV, NUMBER 12

CONTENTS

FRONTISPIECE

ART AND FORTUNE, Lionel Trilling 1271

RUBIO Y MORENA, Tennessee Williams 1293

CEDAR OF CEDARS, William Burford 1307

THE LION, William Carlos Williams 1308

POEM, Ruth Herschberger 1309

MELANCHOLIA, Ruben Dario 1310

THE LIFE OF LITERATURE (II), Stephan Spender 1311

THE HEART OF THE AFTERNOON, Eleanor Clark 1332

FILM CHRONICLE, Robert Warshow 1336

REVIEWS

- FRENCH WITH TEARS—AND LAUGHTER, William Barrett 1341
- THE HUMAN AND THE MODERN, Joseph Frank 1346
- FICTION CHRONICLE, Elizabeth Hardwick 1351
- HISTORY AND LOGIC, Ernest Nagel 1354
- POSSIBILITIES FOR POLITICS, Irving Howe 1356

VARIETY

- DOES EXISTENTIALISM STILL EXIST? Delmore Schwartz 1361
- A VIEW OF SIR OSBERT SITWELL, Anthony Bower 1364

CORRESPONDENCE 1369

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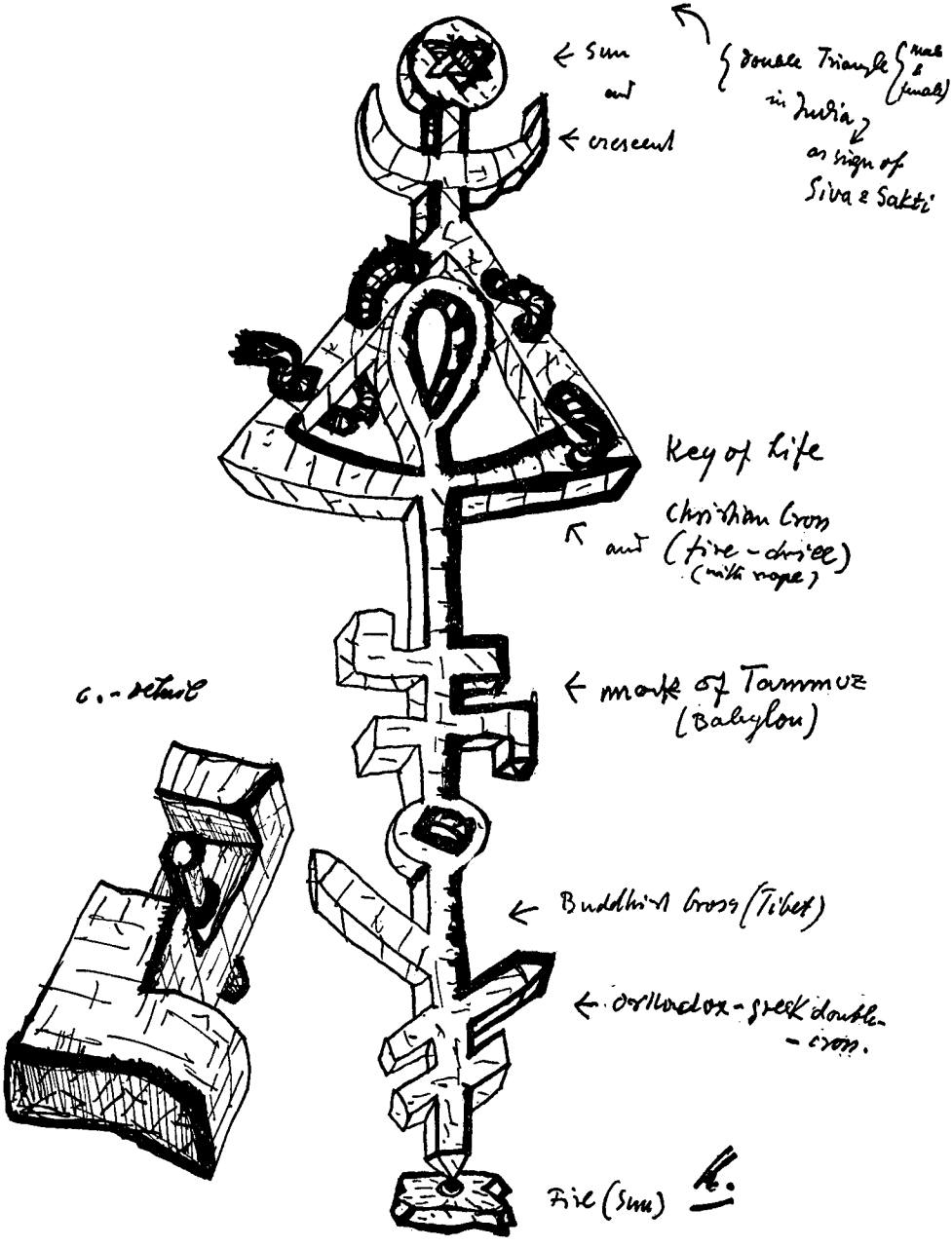

TOTEM OF RELIGIONS by Frederick Kiesler (drawing for sculpture, 1947).

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Lionel Trilling

ART AND FORTUNE*

It is impossible to talk about the novel nowadays without having in our minds the question of whether or not the novel is still a living form. Twenty-five years ago Mr. Eliot said that the novel came to an end with Flaubert and James, and at about the same time Senor Ortega said much the same thing. This opinion is now heard on all sides. It is heard in conversation rather than read in formal discourse, for to insist on the death or moribundity of a great genre is an unhappy task which the critic will naturally avoid if he can, yet the opinion is now an established one and has a very considerable authority. Do we not see its influence in, for example, Mr. V. S. Pritchett's recent book, *The Living Novel*?—for although Mr. Pritchett is himself a novelist and writes about the novel with the perception that comes of love, and even, by the name he gives his book, disputes the fact of the novel's death, yet still, despite these tokens of his faith, he deals with the subject under a kind of constraint, as if he had won the right to claim life for the novel only upon conditions of not claiming for it much power.

I do not believe that the novel is dead. And yet particular forms of the creative imagination may indeed die—English poetic drama stands as the great witness of the possibility—and there might at this time be an advantage in accepting the proposition as an hypothesis which will lead us to understand under what conditions the novel may live.

If we consent to speak of the novel as dead, three possible ex-

* This essay, in a longer version, was one of a group of papers on the novel which were read at sessions of the English Institute at Columbia University in September of this year. In its extended form it will appear with the other papers in a volume to be edited by David Daiches and published by the Institute.

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planations of the fact spring at once to mind. The first is simply that the genre has been exhausted, worked out in the way that a lode of ore is worked out—it can no longer yield a valuable supply of its natural matter. The second explanation is that the novel was developed in response to certain cultural circumstances which now no longer exist but have given way to other circumstances which must be met by other forms of the imagination. The third explanation is that although the circumstances to which the novel was a response do still exist, we either lack the power to use the form,* or we no longer find value in the answers that the novel provides, because the continuing circumstances have entered a phase of increased intensity.

The first theory was put forward by Ortega in his essay, "Notes on the Novel." It is an explanation which has its clear limitations, but it is certainly not without its cogency. We have all had the experience of feeling that some individual work of art, or some canon of art, or a whole idiom of art, has lost, temporarily or permanently, its charm and power. Sometimes we weary of the habitual or half-mechanical devices by which the artist warms up for his ideas or by which he bridges the gap between his ideas; this can happen even with Mozart. Sometimes it is the very essence of the man's thought that fatigues; we feel that his characteristic insights can too easily be foreseen and we become too much aware of how they exist at the expense of blindness to other truths; this can happen even with Dostoevsky. And so with an entire genre of art—there may come a moment when it cannot satisfy one of our legitimate demands, which is that it shall surprise us. This demand and the liability of our artistic interests to wear out do not show us to be light-minded. Without them our use of art would be only ritualistic, or commemorative of our past experiences; and although there is nothing wrong in using art for ritual and commemoration, still these are not the largest uses to which it can be put. Curiosity is as much an instinct as hunger and love, and curiosity about any particular thing may be satisfied.

Then we must consider that technique has its autonomy and that it dictates the laws of its own growth. Aristotle speaks of Athenian tragedy as seeking and finding its fulfillment, its entelechy, and it

* This might seem to beg the cultural question; yet certain technical abilities do deteriorate or disappear for reasons which, although theoretically ascertainable, are almost beyond practical determination.

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may be that we are interested in any art only just so long as it is in process of search, that what moves us is the mysterious energy of quest. At a certain point in the development of a genre, the practitioner looks back and sees all that has been done by others before him and knows that no ordinary effort can surpass or even match it; ordinary effort can only repeat. It is at this point that, as Ortega says, we get the isolated extraordinary effort which transcends the tradition and brings it to an end. This, no doubt, is what people mean when they speak of Joyce and Proust bringing the novel to its grave.

Here is the case, as strongly as I can put it, for the idea that a genre can exhaust itself simply by following the laws of its own development. As an explanation of the death of the novel it does not sufficiently exfoliate or sufficiently connect with the world. It can by no means be ignored but of itself it cannot give an adequate answer to our question.

2

So we must now regard the novel as an art form contrived to do a certain kind of work, its existence conditioned by the nature of that work. In a recent essay* I undertook to say what the work of the novel was—I said that it was the investigation of reality and illusion. Of course the novel does not differ in this from all other highly developed literary forms; it differs, however, in at least one significant respect—that it deals with reality and illusion in relation to questions of social class, which, in relatively recent times, are bound up with money.

In Western civilization the idea of money exercises a great fascination—it is the fascination of an actual thing which has attained a metaphysical ideality, or of a metaphysical entity which has attained actual existence. Spirits and ghosts are beings in such a middling state of existence; and money is both real and not real, like a spook. We invented money and we use it, yet we cannot either understand its laws or control its actions. It has a life of its own which it properly should not have—Karl Marx speaks with a kind of horror of its indecent power to reproduce, as if, he says, love were working in

* "Manners, Morals and the Novel," *Kenyon Review,* Winter, 1948.

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its body. It is impious, being critical of existent social realities, and it has the effect of lessening their degree of reality. The social reality upon which it has its most devastating effect is, of course, that of class. And class itself is a social fact which, whenever it is brought into question, has itself a remarkable intimacy with metaphysics and the theory of knowledge—I have suggested how for Shakespeare any derangement of social classes seems always to imply a derangement of the senses in madness or dream, some elaborate joke about the nature of reality. This great joke is the matter of the book which we acknowledge as the ancestor of the modern novel, *Don Quixote;* and indeed no great novel exists which does not have this joke at its very heart.

In the essay to which I refer I also said that, in dealing with the questions of illusion and reality which were raised by the ideas of money and class, the novel characteristically relied upon an exhaustive exploitation of manners. Although I tried to give a sufficiently strong and complicated meaning to the word *manners,* I gather that my merely having used the word, or perhaps my having used it in a context which questioned certain political assumptions of a pious sort, has led to the belief that I am interested to establish a new genteel tradition in criticism and fiction. Where misunderstanding serves others as an advantage, one is helpless to make oneself understood; yet to guard as well as I can against this imputation, I will not only say that the greatest exploitation of manners ever made is the *Iliad* but also that *The Possessed* and *Studs Lonigan* are works whose concern with manners is of their very essence.

To these characteristics of the novel—the interest in illusion and reality as generated by class and money, this interest expressed by the observation of manners—we must add the unabashed interest in ideas. From its very beginning the novel made *books* the objects of its regard. Nowadays we are inclined to see the appearance of a literary fact in a novel as the sign of its "intellectuality" and specialness of appeal, and even as a sign of decadence. But Joyce's solemn literary discussions in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or his literary play in the later works, or Proust's critical excursions, are in the direct line of *Don Quixote* and *Tom Jones,* which are works of literary criticism before they are anything else. The Germans had a useful name for a certain kind of novel which they called

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a *Kulturroman*; actually every great novel deserves that name, for it is hard to think of one that is not precisely a romance of culture. By culture we must mean not merely the general social condition to which the novel responds but a particular congeries of formulated ideas. The great novels, far more often than we remember, deal explicitly with developed ideas, and although they vary greatly in the degree of their explicitness, they tend to be more explicit rather than less. Nowadays the criticism which descends from Eliot puts ideas in literature at a discount—which is one reason why it is exactly this criticism that is most certain of the death of the novel—and it has led many of us to forget how, in the novel, ideas may be as important as character and as essential to the given dramatic situation. In addition to the works I have mentioned there stand as examples *Lost Illusions, A Sentimental Education, War and Peace, The Brothers Karamazov,* and *Jude the Obscure.*

This, then, as I understand it, is the nature of the novel as defined by the work it does. Of its defining conditions how many are in force today?

We cannot say that money and class have the same place in our social and mental life that they once had. They have indeed not ceased to exist, but certainly they do not exist as they did in the nineteenth century or even in our own youth. Money of itself no longer can engage the imagination as it once did; it has lost some of its impulse and certainty, it is on the defensive, it must compete on the one hand with the ideal of security, and on the other hand with the ideal of a power which may be more directly applied. As for class, in Europe the bourgeoisie together with its foil, the aristocracy, has been weakening for decades. It ceased some time ago to be the chief source of political leaders; its nineteenth century position as ideologue of the world has vanished before the ideological strength of totalitarian communism; the wars brought it to the point of economic ruin. In England the middle class is in process of liquidating itself. In this country the real basis of the novel has never existed—that is, the tension between a middle class and an aristocracy which brings manners into observable relief as the living representation of ideals and the living comment on ideas. Our class structure has been extraordinarily fluid; our various upper classes have seldom been able or stable enough to establish their culture as authoritative.

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With the single exception of the Civil War, our political struggles have not had the kind of cultural implications which catch the imagination, and the extent to which this one conflict has engaged the American mind suggests how profoundly interesting conflicts of culture may be. (It is possible to say that the Cromwellian revolution appears in every English novel.) For the rest, the opposition between rural and urban ideals has always been rather factitious; and despite a brief attempt to insist on the opposite view, the conflict of capital and labor is at present a contest for the possession of the goods of a single way of life, and not a cultural struggle. Our most fervent interest in manners has been linguistic, and our pleasure in drawing distinctions between a presumably normative way of speech and an "accent" or a "dialect" may suggest how simple is our national notion of social difference.* And of recent years, although we grow more passionately desirous of status and are haunted by the ghost of every status-conferring ideal, we more and more incline to show our status-lust not by affirming but by denying the reality of social difference.

I think that if American novels of the past, whatever their merits of intensity and beauty, have given us very few substantial or memorable people, this is because one of the things which makes for substantiality of character in the novel is precisely the notation of manners—that is to say, of class traits modified by personality. It is impossible to imagine a Silas Wegg or a Smerdyakov or a Félicité of *A Simple Heart* or a Mrs. Proudie without the full documentation of their behavior in relation to their own class and to

* Lately our official egalitarianism has barred the exploitation of this interest by our official arts, the movies and the radio; there may be some social wisdom in this, yet it ignores the fact that at least certain forms and tones of the mockery of their speech habits are a means by which "extraneous" groups are accepted. — Mention of this naturally leads to the question of whether the American attitude toward "minority" groups, particularly Negroes and Jews, is not the equivalent of class differentiation. I think it is not, except in a highly modified way. And for the purposes of the novel it is not the same thing at all, for two reasons: 1. it involves no real cultural struggle, no significant conflict of ideals, for the excluded group has the same notion of life and the same aspirations as the excluding group, although the novelist who attempts the subject naturally uses the tactic of showing that the excluded group has a different and better ethos; 2. it is impossible to suppose that the novelist who chooses this particular subject will be able to muster the satirical ambivalence toward both groups which marks the good novel even when it has a social *parti pris*.

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other classes. All great characters exist in part by reason of the ideas they represent. The great characters of American fiction—such, say, as Captain Ahab and Natty Bumppo—tend to be mythic because of the rare fineness and abstractness of the ideas they represent; and their very freedom from class gives them a large and glowing generality. They are few in number and special in kind; and American fiction has nothing to show like the huge substantial population of the European novel, the substantiality of which is precisely a product of a class existence. In fiction, as perhaps in life, the conscious realization of social class produces intention, passion, thought, and what I have called substantiality. The diminution of its reality, however socially desirable in many respects, seems to have the practical effect of diminishing our ability to see people in their difference and specialness.

Then we must be aware of how great has been the falling-off in the energy of mind that once animated fiction. In the nineteenth century the novel followed the great lines of political thought, both the conservative and the radical, and it documented politics with an original and brilliant sociology. In addition, it developed its own line of psychological discovery, which had its issue in the monumental work of Freud. But now there is no conservative tradition and no radical tradition of political thought and not even an eclecticism which is in the slightest degree touched by the imagination—we are in the hands of the commentator. On the continent of Europe political choice may be possible, but political thought is not; and in a far more benign context the same may be said of England. And in this country, although for different reasons, there is a similar lack of political intelligence: all over the world the political mind lies passive before action and the event. In psychological thought we find a strange concerted effort of regression from psychoanalysis, the reformulations of the analytical psychology which Dr. Horney and Dr. Sullivan make in the name of reason and society and progress, marked by the most astonishing weakness of mind, appealing to the liberal intellectual by an exploitation of the liberal intellectual's fond belief that he suspects "orthodoxy." Nor, really, can it be said that the Freudian psychology itself has of late made any significant advances.

This weakness of our general intellectual life is reflected in our novels. So far as the novel touches social and political questions it

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permits itself to choose only between a cheery or a sour democratism; it is questionable whether any American novel since *Babbitt* has told us a new thing about our social life. In psychology the novel relies either on a mechanical or on a clinical use of psychiatry, or on the insights that were established by the novelists of fifty years ago.

It is not, then, unreasonable to suppose that we are at the close of a cultural cycle, that the historical circumstances which called forth the particular intellectual effort in which we once lived and moved and had our being is now at an end, and that the novel, as part of that effort, is as deciduous as the rest.

3

But there is an explanation of the death of the novel which is both corollary and alternative to this. Consider a main intellectual preoccupation of the period that ends with Freud and begins with Swift or with Shakespeare's middle period or with Montaigne—it does not matter just where we set the beginning so long as we start with some typical and impressive representation, secular and not religious, of man's depravity and weakness. Freud said of his own theories that they appealed to him as acting, like the theories of Darwin and Copernicus, to diminish man's pride, and this intention, carried out by means of the demonstration of man's depravity, has been one of the chief works of the human mind for some four hundred years. What the mind was likely to discover in this period was, by and large, much the same thing, yet mind was always active in the enterprise of discovery; discovery itself was a kind of joy and sometimes a hope, no matter how great was the depravity that was turned up; the activity of the mind was a kind of fortitude. Then too, there was reassurance in the resistance that was offered to the assaults of mind upon the strong texture of the social facade of humanity. That part of the mind which delights in discovery was permitted its delight by the margin that existed between speculation and proof; had the mind been able fully to prove what it believed it would have fainted and failed before its own demonstration, but so strongly entrenched were the forces of respectable optimism and belief in human and social goodness that the demonstration could never be finally established but had to be attempted over and over again. Now, however,

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the old margin no longer exists; the facade is down; society's resistance to the discovery of depravity has ceased; now everyone knows that Thackeray was wrong, Jonathan Swift right. The world and the soul have split open of themselves and are all agape for our revolted inspection. The simple eye of the camera shows us, at Belsen and Buchenwald, horrors that quite surpass Swift's powers, a vision of life turned back to its corrupted elements which is more disgusting than any that Shakespeare could contrive, a cannibalism more literal and fantastic than that which Montaigne ascribed to organized society. A characteristic activity of mind is therefore no longer needed. Indeed, before what we now know the mind stops—the great psychological fact of our time which we all observe with baffled wonder and shame is that there is no possible way of responding to Belsen and Buchenwald. The activity of mind fails before the incommunicability of man's suffering.

This may help to explain the general deterioration of our intellectual life. It may also help to explain an attitude to our life in general. Twenty-five years ago Ortega spoke of the "dehumanization" of modern art. Much of what he said about the nature of modern art has, by modern art, been proved wrong, or was wrong even when he said it. But Ortega was right in observing of modern art that it expresses a dislike of holding in the mind the human fact and the human condition, that it shows "a real loathing of living forms and living beings," a disgust with the "rounded and soft forms of living bodies"; and that together with this revulsion, or expressed by it, we find a disgust with history and society and the state. Human life as an aesthetic object can perhaps no longer command our best attention; the day seems to have gone when the artist who dealt in representation could catch our interest almost by the mere listing of the ordinary details of human existence; and the most extreme and complex of human dilemmas now surely seem to many to have lost their power of interest. This seems to be supported by evidence from those arts for which a conscious exaltation of humanistic values is stock-in-trade—I mean advertising and our middling novels, which, almost in the degree that they celebrate the human, falsify and abstract it; in the very business of expressing adoration of the rounded and soft forms of living bodies they expose the disgust which they really feel.

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At this point we are in the full tide of those desperate perceptions of our life which are current nowadays among thinking and talking people, which, even when we are not thinking and talking, haunt and control our minds with visions of losses worse than that of existence—losses of culture, personality, humanness. They sink our spirits not merely because they are terrible and possible but because they have become so obvious and cliché as to close for us the possibility of thought and imagination.

And at this point too we must see that if the novel is dead or dying, it is not alone in its mortality. The novel is a kind of summary and paradigm of our cultural life, which is perhaps why we speak sooner of its death than of the death of any other form of thought. It has been, of all literary forms, the most devoted to the celebration and investigation of the human will; and the will of our society is dying of its own excess. The religious will, the political will, the sexual will, the artistic will—each is dying of its own excess. The novel at its greatest is the record of the will acting under the direction of an idea, often an idea of will itself. All else in the novel is but secondary, and those examples which do not deal with the will in action are but secondary in their genre. Sensibility in the novel is but notation and documentation of the will in action. Again *Don Quixote* gives us our first instance. In its hero we have the modern conception of the will in a kind of wry ideality. Flaubert said that Emma Bovary was Quixote's sister, and in her we have the modern will in a kind of corruption. Elizabeth Bennett and Emma Woodhouse and Jane Eyre are similarly related to all the Karamazovs, to Stavrogin and to that Kirillov who was led by awareness of the will to assert it ultimately by destroying it in himself with a pistol-shot.

Surely the great work of our time is the restoration and the reconstitution of the will. I know that with some the opinion prevails that, apart from what very well *may* happen by way of Apocalypse, what *should* happen is that we advance further and further into the darkness, seeing to it that the will finally exhausts and expends itself to the end that we purge our minds of all the old ways of thought and feeling, giving up all hope of ever reconstituting the

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great former will of humanism, which, as they imply, has brought us to this pass. One must always listen when this opinion is offered in true passion. But for the vision and ideal of apocalyptic renovation one must be either a particular kind of moral genius with an attachment to life that goes beyond attachment to any particular form of life—D. H. Lawrence was such a genius—or a person deficient in attachment to life in any of its forms. Most of us are neither one nor the other, and our notions of renovation and reconstitution are social and pragmatic and, in the literal sense of the word, conservative. To restoration and reconstitution of the will thus understood the novelistic intelligence is most apt.

When I try to say on what grounds I hold this belief, my mind turns to a passage in Henry James's preface to *The American*. James has raised the question of "reality" and "romance," and he remarks that "of the men of largest resounding imagination before the human scene, of Scott, of Balzac, even of the coarse, comprehensive, prodigious Zola, we feel, I think, that the reflexion toward either quarter has never taken place"—they have never, that is, exclusively committed themselves either to "reality" or to "romance" but have maintained an equal commerce with both. And this, James goes on to say, is the secret of their power with us. Then follows an attempt to distinguish between "reality" and "romance," which defines "reality" as "the things we cannot possibly not know," and then gives us this sentence: "The romantic stands . . . . for the things that, with all the facilities in the world, all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure, we never *can* directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit of thought and desire."

The sentence is perhaps not wholly perspicuous, yet if I understand it at all, it points to the essential moral nature of the novel. Julien Sorel eventually acquired all the facilities in the world; he used "all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure" to gain the things that are to be gained by their means; what he gained was ashes in his mouth. But what in the end he gained, came to him in prison not by means of the "facilities" but through the beautiful circuit of thought and desire, and it impelled him to make his great speech to the Besançon jury in which he threw away his life; his happiness and his heroism came, I think, from his

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will having exhausted all that part of itself which naturally turns to the inferior objects offered by the social world and from its learning to exist in the strength of its own knowledge of its thought and desire. I have said that awareness of the will in its beautiful circuit of thought and desire was the peculiar property of the novel, yet in point of fact we find it long before the novel came into existence and in a place where it always surprises us, in the *Inferno,* at the meetings of Dante with Paolo and Francesca, with Brunetto Latini and with Ulysses, the souls who keep the energy of thought and desire alive and who are therefore forever loved however damned. For James the objects of this peculiarly human energy go by the name of "romance." The word is a risky one and therefore it is necessary to say that it does not stand for the unknowable, for what is vulgarly called "the ideal," let alone for that which is pleasant and charming because far off. It stands for the world of unfolding possibility, for that which, when brought to actuality, is powerfully operative. It is thus a synonym for the will in its creative aspect, especially in its aspect of *moral* creativeness, as it subjects itself to criticism and conceives for itself new states of being. The novel has had a long dream of virtue in which the will, while never abating its strength and activity, learns to refuse to exercise itself upon the unworthy objects with which the social world tempts it, and either conceives its own right objects or becomes content with its own sense of its potential force—which is why so many novels give us, before their end, some representation, often crude enough, of the will unbroken but in stasis.

It is the element of what James calls "romance," this operative reality of thought and desire, which, in the novel, exists side by side with the things "we cannot possibly not know," that suggests to me the novel's reconstitutive and renovating power.

5

If there is any ground for my belief that the novel can, by reason of one of its traditional elements, do something in the work of reconstituting and renovating the will, there may be some point in trying to say under what particular circumstances of its own nature and action it may best succeed.

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I think it will not succeed if it accepts the latest-advanced theory of the novel, Jean-Paul Sartre's theory of "dogmatic realism." According to the method of this theory, the novel is to be written as if without an author and without a personal voice and "without the foolish business of story-telling." The reader is to be subjected to situations as nearly equivalent as possible to those of life itself; he is to be prevented from falling out of the book, kept as strictly as possible within its confines and power by every possible means, including so literal a means as the closest approximation of fictional to historical time, for the introduction of large periods of time would permit him to remember that he is involved in an illusion; he is, in short, to be made to forget that he is reading a book. We all know the devices by which the sensations of actual life, such as claustrophobia and fatigue, are generated in the reader; and although the novels which succeed in the use of these devices have had certain good effects, they have had bad effects too. By good and bad effects I mean, as Sartre means, good and bad social effects. The banishment of the author from his books, the stilling of his voice, have but reinforced the faceless hostility of the world and have tended to teach us that we ourselves are not creative agents and that we have no voice, no tone, no style, no real or significant existence. Surely what we need is the opposite of this, the opportunity to identify ourselves with a mind that willingly admits that it *is* a mind and does not pretend that it is History or Events or the World but only a mind thinking and planning—possibly planning our escape.

There is not very much that is actually original in Sartre's theory, which seems to derive from Flaubert at a not very great remove. Flaubert himself never could, despite his own theory, keep himself out of his books—we always know who is there by guessing who it is that is kept out: it makes a great difference just which author is kept out of a novel, and Flaubert's absence occupies more room than Sartre's, and is a much more various and impressive thing. And Flaubert's mind, in or out of his novels, presents itself to us as an ally, although, as I more and more come to think, the alliance it offers is dangerous.

As for what Sartre calls "the foolish business of story-telling," I believe that, so far from giving it up, the novel will have to insist on it more and more. It is exactly the story that carries what James

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calls "romance," which is what the theologians call "faith," and in the engaged and working literature which Sartre rightly asks for this is an essential element. To know a story when we see one, to know it *for* a story, to know that it is not reality itself but that it has clear and effective relations with reality—this is one of the great disciplines of the mind.

In speaking against the ideal of the authorless novel I am not, of course, speaking in behalf of the "personality" of the author consciously displayed—nothing could be more frivolous—but only in behalf of the liberating effects that may be achieved when literature understands itself to be literature and does not identify itself with what it surveys. (This is as intellectually necessary as for science not to represent itself as a literal picture of the universe.) The authorial minds that in *Tom Jones* and *Tristram Shandy* play with events and the reader in so nearly divine a way become the great and strangely effective symbols of liberty operating in the world of necessity, and this is more or less true of all the novelists who *contrive* and *invent.*

Yet when I speak in defense of the salutary play of the mind in the controlled fantasy of story-telling I am not defending the works of consciously literary, elaborately styled fantasy in the manner of, let us say, *Nightwood,* which in their own way subscribe to the principles of Sartre's dogmatic realism, for although the conscious literary intention of the author is always before us, yet style itself achieves the claustral effect which Sartre would manage by the representation of events.

Mr. Eliot praises the prose of *Nightwood* for having so much affinity with poetry. This is not a virtue, and I believe that it will not be mistaken for a virtue by any novel of the near future which will interest us. The loss of a natural prose, one which has at least a seeming affinity with good common speech, has often been noted. It seems to me that the observation of the loss has been too complacently made and that its explanations, while ingenious, have had the intention of preventing it from being repaired in kind. A prose which approaches poetry has no doubt its own value, but it cannot serve to repair the loss of a straightforward prose, rapid, masculine and committed to events, making its effects not by the single word or by the phrase but by words properly and naturally massed. I con-

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ceive that the creation of such a prose should be one of the conscious intentions of any novelist.*

And as a corollary to my rejection of poetic prose for the novel, I would suggest that the novelist of the next decades will not occupy himself with questions of form. The admitted weakness of the contemporary novel, the far greater strength of poetry, the current strong interest in the theory of poetry have created a situation in which the canons of poetical perfection are quite naturally but too literally applied to the novel. These canons have not so much reinforced as displaced the formal considerations of Flaubert and James which have their own dangers but which were at least conceived for the novel itself. I make every expectable disclaimer of wishing to depreciate form and then go on to say that a conscious preoccupation with form at the present time is almost certain to lead the novelist—particularly the young novelist—into limitation. The notions of form which are at present current among even those who are highly trained in literature—let alone among the semi-literary, who are always very strict about enforcing the advanced ideas of forty years ago—are all too simple and often seem to come down to nothing more than the form of the sonata, the return on the circle with appropriate repetitions of theme. For the modern highly trained literary sensibility, form suggests completeness and the ends tucked in; resolution is seen only as all contradictions equated, and although form thus understood has its manifest charm, it will not adequately serve the modern experience. A story, like the natural course of an emotion, has its own form and I take it as the sign of our inadequate trust of story and of our exaggerated interest in sensibility that we have begun to insist on the precise ordering of the novel.

Then I venture the prediction that the novel of the next decades will deal in a very explicit way with ideas. The objections to this

* The question of prose is as important as that of prosody and we never pay enough attention to it in criticism. I am far from thinking that my brief paragraph even opens the subject adequately. The example of Joyce has been urged against the little I have just said. It seems to me that whenever the prose of *A Portrait of the Artist* becomes what we call poetic, it is in a very false taste; this has been defended as being a dramatic device, an irony against the hero. *Ulysses* may be taken as making a strong case against my own preference, yet I think that its raw material, which is variously manipulated, is essentially the prose I ask for. The medium of *Finnegans Wake* may, without prejudice, be said to be something other than prose in any traditional sense; if it should establish a tradition it will also establish new criteria and problems.

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will be immediate. Everybody quotes Mr. Eliot's remark about Henry James having a mind so fine that no idea could violate it, which suggests an odd, violent, notion of the relation of minds and ideas, not at all the notion that James himself held; and everybody knows the passage in which Mr. Eliot insists on the indifferent connection which Dante and Shakespeare had with the intellectual formulations of their respective times. I think I can understand—and sympathetically as well as sociologically—Mr. Eliot's feeling for a mode of being in which the act and tone of ideation are not dominant, just as I can understand the admiration which may be felt for a society, such as Yeats celebrated, which expresses its sense of life not by means of words but by means of houses and horses and by means of violence, manners, courage and death. But I do not understand what Mr. Eliot means when he makes a sharp distinction between ideas and emotions in literature; I think that Plato was right when in *The Symposium* he represented ideas as continuous with emotions, both springing from the appetites.

It is a prevailing notion that a novel which contains or deals with ideas is bound to be pallid and abstract and intellectual. As against this belief here is an opinion from the great day of the novel. "There are active souls who like rapidity, movement, conciseness, sudden shocks, action, drama, who avoid discussion, who have little fondness for meditation and take pleasure in results. From such people comes what I should call the Literature of Ideas." This odd definition, whose seeming contradictions we will not pause over, was made by Balzac in the course of his long review of *The Charterhouse of Parma,* and it is Stendhal whom Balzac mentions as the great exemplar of the literature of ideas. And we know what ideas are at work in *The Charterhouse* and *The Red and the Black*: they are the ideas of Rousseau and they are named as such. These ideas are not to be separated from the passions of Julien and Fabrice; they are reciprocally expressive of each other. To us it is strange that ideas should be expressed so, and also in terms of prisons and rope-ladders, pistols and daggers. It should not seem strange, for it is in the nature of ideas to be so expressed.

Yet although these two great examples support much of my view of the place of ideas in the novel, they do not support all of it. They make for me the point of the continuity of ideas and emotions,

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which in our literary context is forgotten. And they remind us forcibly of the ideological nature of institutions and classes. But in Stendhal's novels the ideas, although precisely identified, are chiefly represented by character and dramatic action and although this form of representation has of course very high aesthetic advantages, yet I would claim for the novel the right and the necessity to deal with ideas by means other than that of what we have come to call the objective correlative, to deal with them directly as it deals with people or terrain or social setting.

There is an obvious social fact which supports this claim. No one who is in the least aware of our social life today can miss seeing that ideas have acquired a new kind of place in society. Nowadays everyone is involved in ideas—or, to be more accurate, in ideology. The impulse of novelists, which has been much decried, to make their heroes intellectuals of some sort, was, however dull it became, perfectly sound: they wanted people of whom it was clear that ideas were an important condition of their lives. But this limitation to avowed intellectuals is no longer needed: in our society the simplest person is involved with ideas. Every person we meet in the course of our daily life, no matter how unlettered he may be, is groping with sentences toward a sense of his life and his position in it; and he has what almost always goes with an impulse to ideology, a good deal of animus and anger. What would so much have pleased the social philosophers of an earlier time has come to pass—ideological organization has cut across class organization, generating loyalties and animosities which are perhaps even more intense than those of class. The increase of conscious formulation, the increase of a certain kind of conciousness by formulation, make a fact of modern life which is never sufficiently estimated. This is a condition which has been long in developing, for it began with the movements of religious separatism; now politics, and not only politics but the requirements of a whole culture, make verbal and articulate the motive of every human act: we eat by reason, copulate by statistics, rear children by rule, and the one impulse we do not regard with critical caution is that toward ideation, which increasingly becomes a basis of prestige.

This presents the novel with both an opportunity and a duty. The opportunity is a subject matter. Social class and the conflicts it produces may not be any longer a compelling subject to the novelist,

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but the organization of society into ideological groups presents a subject scarcely less absorbing. Ideological society has, it seems to me, nearly as full a range of passion and nearly as complex a system of manners as a society based on social class. Its promise of comedy and tragedy is enormous; its assurance of relevance is perfect. Dostoevsky adequately demonstrated this for us, but we never had in this country a sufficiently complex ideological situation to support it in our own practice of the novel. We have it now.

This opportunity of the novel clearly leads to its duty. Ideology is not ideas, ideology is not acquired by thought but by breathing the haunted air. The life in ideology, from which none of us can wholly escape, is a strange submerged life of habit and semi-habit in which to ideas we attach strong passions but no very clear awareness of the concrete reality of their consequences. To live the life of ideology with its special form of unconsciousness is to expose oneself to the risk of becoming an agent of what Kant called "the Radical Evil," which is "man's inclination to corrupt the imperatives of morality so that they may become a screen for the expression of self-love."* But the novel is a genre with a very close and, really, a very simple relation to actuality, to the things we cannot possibly not know—not if they are pointed out to us; it is the form in which the things we cannot possibly not know live side by side with thought and desire, both in their true and beautiful state or in their corrupt state; it is the form which provides the perfect criticism of ideas by attaching them to their appropriate actuality. No less than in its infancy, and now perhaps with a greater urgency and relevance, the novel passionately concerns itself with reality, with appearance and reality.

6

But I must not end on a note so high—it would falsify my present intention and my whole feeling about the novel. To speak now of "duty" and, as I earlier did, of the work the novel may do in the

* Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man,* vol. I, p. 120, n. "'This evil is radical,' [Kant] declares, 'because it corrupts the very basis of all maxims.' In analyzing the human capacity for self-deception and its ability to make the worse appear the better reason for the sake of providing a moral façade for selfish actions, Kant penetrates into spiritual intricacies and mysteries to which he seems to remain completely blind in his *Critique of Practical Reason.*"

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reconstitution and renovation of the will, to formulate a function and a destiny for the novel, is to put it into a compromised position where it has been far too long already. The novel was better off when it was more humbly conceived than it is now; the novelist was in a far more advantageous position when his occupation was misprized, or when it was estimated by simpler minds than his own, when he was nearly alone in his sense of wonder at the possibilties of his genre, at the great effects it might be made to yield. The novel was luckier when it had to compete with the sermon, with works of history, with philosophy and poetry and with the ancient classics, when its social position was in question and, like one of its own poor or foundling or simple heroes, it had to make its way against odds. Whatever high intentions it may have had, it was permitted to stay close to its primitive elements from which it drew power. Believing this, I do not wish to join in the concerted effort of contemporary criticism to increase the superego of the novel, to conspire with our sense of cultural crisis to heap responsibilities upon it, to hedge it about with prescribed functions and spiked criteria; as things are, the novel feels quite guilty enough.

A sentence in Aristotle's *Ethics* has always been memorable, perhaps because I have never rightly understood it. Aristotle says, "There is a sense in which Chance and Art have the same sphere; as Agathon says, 'Art fosters Fortune; Fortune Fosters Art.' " Taken out of its context and merely as a gnomic sentence, this says much. It says something about the reciprocation which in the act of composition exists between form and free invention, each making the other, which even the most considerate criticism can never really be aware of and often belies. *Fortune fosters Art*—there is indeed something fortuitous in all art, and in the novel the element of the fortuitous is especially large. The novel achieves its best effects of art often when it has no concern with them, when it is fixed upon effects in morality, or when it is simply reporting what it conceives to be objective fact. The converse is of course also true, that the novel makes some of its best moral discoveries or presentations of fact when it is concerned with form, when it manipulates its material merely in accordance with some notion of order or beauty, although it must be stipulated that this is likely to occur only when what is manipulated resists enough, the novel being the form whose aesthetic must pay an unusually large

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and simple respect to its chosen material. This predominance of fortuitousness in the novel accounts for the roughness of grain, even the coarseness of grain as compared with other arts, that runs through it. The novel is, as many have said of it, the least "artistic" of genres. For this it pays its penalty and it has become in part the grave as well as the monument of many great spirits who too carelessly have entrusted their talents to it. Yet the headlong, profuse, often careless quality of the novel, though no doubt wasteful, is an aspect of its bold and immediate grasp on life.

But from this very sense of its immediacy to life we have come to over-value the novel. We have, for example, out of awareness of its power, demanded that it change the world—no genre has ever had so great a burden of social requirement put upon it (which, incidentally it has very effectively discharged), or has been so strictly ordered to give up, in the fulfillment of its assigned function, all that was unconscious and ambivalent and playful in itself. Our sense of its comprehensiveness and effectiveness have led us to make a legend of it: one of the dreams of a younger America, continuing up to recently, was of *The* Great American Novel, which was always imagined to be as solitary and omniseminous as the Great White Whale. Then we have subjected it to criteria which are irrelevant to its nature—how many of us happily share the horror which John Gould Fletcher expressed at the discovery that Trollope thought of novel-writing as a trade. The over-valuation of love is the beginning of the end of love; the over-valuation of art is the beginning of the end of art.

What I have called the roughness of grain of the novel and praised as such corresponds with something in the nature of the novelists themselves. Of all practitioners of literature, novelists as a class have made the most aggressive assault upon the world, the most personal demand upon it, and no matter how obediently they have listened to their daemons they have kept an ear cocked at the crowd and have denounced its dulness in not responding with gifts of power and fame. This personal demand the haughtiest reserve of Flaubert and James did not try to hide. The novelists have wanted much and very openly; and with great simplicity and naivety they have mixed what they personally desired with what they desired for the world, and have mingled their mundane needs with their largest judgments.

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Then, great as their mental force has been, they have been touched with something like stupidity, resembling the holy stupidity which Pascal recommends: its effects appear in their ability to maintain ambivalence, which is not an acquired attitude of mind, or a weakness of mind, but rather the translation of a biological datum, an extension of the pleasure-pain with which, in a healthy state, we respond to tension and effort; the novelist expresses this in his coexistent hatred and love of the life he observes. His inconsistency of intellectual judgment is biological wisdom.

It is at this point that I must deal with a lapse in my argument of which I am aware. My statement of belief that the novel is not dead, together with what I have said about what the novel should or should not do, very likely does not weigh against those circumstances in our civilization which I have adduced as accounting for the hypothetical death of the novel. To me certainly these circumstances are very real. And as I describe the character of the novelist they inevitably occur to me again. For it is exactly that character and what in a culture it suggests that the terrible circumstances of our time destroy. The novelist's assertion of personal demand and his frank mingling of the mundane and personal with the high and general, his holy stupidity, or as Keats called it, "negative capability," which is his animal faith—can these persist against the assaults which the world now makes on them? If the novel cannot indeed exist without ambivalence, does what the world presents us with any longer permit ambivalence? The novelist could once speak of the beautiful circuit of thought and desire which exists beside the daily reality—but the question is now whether thought and desire have any longer a field of possibility.

No answer can soon be forthcoming. Yet, "as Agathon says, 'Art fosters Fortune; Fortune fosters Art'." There is both an affirmation and an abdication in that sentence; the abdication is as courageous as the affirmation, and the two together make up a good deal of wisdom. If anything of the old novelistic character survives into our day, the novelist will be sufficiently aware of Fortune, of Conditions, of History, being himself, as Fielding said, the historian's heir; but he will also be indifferent to History, sharing the vital stupidity of the World-Historical Figure, who of course is not in the least interested in History but only in his own demands upon life and thus does not

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succumb to History's most malign and subtle trick, which is to fix and fascinate the mind of men with the pride of their foreknowledge of doom. There are times when, as the method of Perseus with the Medusa suggests, you do well not to look straight at what you are dealing with. Which is to say, with reference to the mirror-shield the hero used, "Art fosters Fortune." But the shrug which is implied by the other half of the sentence is no less courageous. It does not suggest that we compare our position with what appears to be the more favored situation of the past, or keep in mind how History has robbed the novelist of a great role. What a demand upon the guarantees of History this implies! What an overvaluation of security, and of success and the career, and of art, and of life itself, which must always be a little undervalued if it is to be lived. Rather should the phrase suggest both the fortuitous and the gratuitous nature of art, how it exists beyond the reach of the will alone, how it is freely given and not always for good reason, and for as little reason taken away. It is not to be demanded, or prescribed or provided for. The understanding of this cannot of itself assure the existence of the novel but it helps toward establishing the state of the soul in which the novel becomes possible.

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Tennessee Williams

RUBIO Y MORENA

The writer Kamrowski had many acquaintances, especially now that his name had begun to acquire some public luster, and he also had a few friends which he had kept over the years the way that you keep a few books you have read several times but are still not willing to part with. He was essentially a lonely man, not self-sufficient but living as though he were. He had never been able to believe that anybody sincerely cared much about him and perhaps no one did. When women treated him tenderly, which sometimes happened in spite of his reserve, he suspected them of trying to pull the wool over his eyes. He was not at ease with them. It even embarrassed him to sit across from a woman at a restaurant table. He could not return her look across the table nor keep his mind on the bright things she was saying. If she happened to wear an ornament at her throat or on the lapel of her jacket he would keep his eyes on this pin and stare at it so intently that finally she would interrupt her talk to ask him why he found it so fascinating or might even unfasten it from her dress and hand it across the table for closer inspection. When going to bed with a woman, desire would often desert his body as soon as he put off his clothes and exposed his nakedness to her. He felt her eyes on him, watching, knowing, involving, and the desire ran out of him like water, leaving him motionless as a dead body on the bed beside her, impervious to her caresses and burning with shame, repulsing her almost roughly if she persisted in trying to waken his passion. But when she had given up trying, when she had finally turned away from his unresponsive body and fallen asleep, then he would turn slowly warm with desire, not shame, and begin to approach the woman until with a moan of longing, greater than even his fear of her had been, he would rouse her from sleep with the brutal haste of a bull in loveless coupling. It was not

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the kind of lovemaking that women respond to with much understanding. There was no tenderness in it, neither before nor after the act was completed, with the frigid embarrassment first and the satiety afterwards, both making him rough and coarse and nearly speechless. He thought of himself as being no good with women, and for that reason his relations with them had been infrequent and fleeting. It was a kind of psychic impotence of which he was bitterly ashamed. He felt it could not be explained so he never tried to explain it. And so he was lonely and unsatisfied outside of his work. He was uniformly kind to everybody just because he found it easier to be that way, but he forgot nearly all of his social engagements, or if he happened to remember one while he was working, he would sigh, not very deeply, and go on working without even stopping to call on the phone and say, Excuse me, I'm working. His attachment to his work was really somewhat absurd for he was not an especially good writer. In fact he was nearly as awkward in his writing as he had been in his relations with women. He wrote the way that he had always made love, with a feeling of apprehension, rushing through it blindly and feverishly as if he were fearful of being unable to complete the act.

You may be wondering why you are presented with these unpleasantly clinical details in advance of the story. It is in order to make more understandable the relationship which the story deals with, a rather singular relationship between the writer Kamrowski and a Mexican girl, Amada, which began in the Mexican border town of Laredo, one summer during the war when Kamrowski was returning from a trip through the Mexican interior.

Because of his suspiciously foreign name and appearance and a nervous habit of speech that easily gave the impression of an accent, Kamrowski had been detained at the border by customs and immigration officials. They had confiscated his papers for an examination by experts in code, and Kamrowski had been forced to remain in Laredo while this examination was in progress. He had taken a room at the Texas Star Hotel. It was intensely hot, the night he spent there. He lay on the huge sagging deck of the bed and smoked cigarettes. Because it was such a hot night he lay there naked with the windows open and the door open, too, hoping to make a draught of air on his body. The room was quite dark except for

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his cigarette and the corridor of the hotel was almost lightless. About three A.M. a figure appeared in the doorway. It was so tall that he took it to be a man. He said nothing but went on smoking and the figure in the doorway appeared to be staring in at him. He had heard things about the deportment of guests at the Texas Star Hotel and so he was not surprised when the door pushed further open and the figure came in and advanced to the edge of the bed. It was only when the head inclined over him and the heavy black hair came tumbling over his bare flesh that he realized the figure to be a woman's. No, he said, but the caller paid no attention and after a while Kamrowski was reconciled to it. Then pleased and, at last, delighted. The meeting had been so successful that in the morning Kamrowski had kept her with him. He asked her no questions. She asked him none. They simply went off together, and seemingly it did not matter where they went. . . .

For a few months Kamrowski and the Mexican girl named Amada, had traveled around the southern states in a rattle-trap car held together by spit and a prayer, and most of that time the girl sat mutely beside him while he thought his own thoughts. What her thoughts were he had not the least idea and not much concern. He only saw her turn her head once and that was when they were passing down the main street of a little town in Louisiana. He turned to see what she looked at. A gaudily dressed negro girl stood on a street-corner in a cluster of roughly dressed white men. Amada smiled faintly and nodded. *Putana,* she said, only that: but the faint smile of recognition remained on her face for quite a while after the corner had slipped out of sight. She did not often smile and that was why the occurrence had stuck in his mind.

Companionship was not a familiar or easy thing for Kamrowski, not even the companionship of men. The girl was the first he had lived with at all continuously, and to his content he found it possible to forget her presence except as some almost abstract comfort like that of warmth or of sleep. Sometimes he would feel a little astonished, a little incredulous over this sudden alliance of theirs, this accidental coming together of their two so different lives. Sometimes he wondered just why he had taken her with him and he could not explain this thing to himself and yet he did not regret it. He had not realized, at first, what a curious-looking person she was, not until

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other people had noticed it for him. Sometimes when they stopped at a filling-station or entered a restaurant at night, he would notice the way strangers looked at her with a sort of amused surprise, and then he would look at her too, and he, too, would be amused and surprised at the strangeness of her appearance. She was tall and narrow-shouldered and most of the flesh of her body had centered about the hips which were as large as the rump of a horse. Her hands were large as a man's but not capable. Their movements were too nervous and her feet clopped awkwardly around. She was forever stumbling or getting caught on something because of her ungainly size and motions. Once the sleeve of her jacket got caught in the slammed car door and instead of quietly opening the door and disengaging the caught sleeve she began to utter short, whimpering cries and to tug at the caught sleeve till the material gave way and a piece of sleeve tore loose. Afterwards he noticed that her whole body was shaking as if she had just passed through some nervous ordeal and throughout their supper at the hotel café she would keep lifting up the torn sleeve and frowning at it with a mystified expression as if she did not understand how it got that way: then glancing at him with her head slightly tilted in a look of inquiry as if to ask him if he understood what had happened to the torn sleeve. After the supper, when they had gone upstairs she took out a pair of scissors and cut the sleeve neatly across to give it an edge. He pointed out to her that this made a disparity between the lengths of the two sleeves. Ha ha, said the girl. She held the jacket up to the light. She saw the disparity herself and began to laugh at it. Finally she threw the jacket into the waste-paper basket and she lay down on the bed with a copy of a movie-magazine. She thumbed through it rapidly till she came to a picture of a young male star on a beach. She stopped at that page. She drew the magazine close to her eyes and stared at it with her large mouth hanging open for half an hour while Kamrowski lay on the bed beside her, only comfortably, warmly half-conscious of her until before sleep, as peacefully as he would sleep, he turned to embrace her.

Kamrowski had grown to love her. Unfortunately he was even less articulate in speaking about such things than he would have been in trying to write about them. He could not make the girl understand the tenderness he felt toward her. He was not a man who

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could even say, I love you. The words would not come off his tongue, not even in the intimacies of the night. He could only speak with his body and his hands. With her child-like mind, the girl must have found him altogether baffling. She could not have been able to believe that he loved her but she must have been equally unable to fathom his reason for staying with her if he did not. Kamrowski would never know how she explained these things to herself or if she tried to explain them or if she was really as mindless as she had seemed: not looking for reasons for things but only accepting that which happens to be as simply being. No. He would never know how. The dark figure in the doorway of the hotel, even mistaken at first for that of a man, did not come into the light. It remained in shadow. *Morena.* She called him *Rubio* sometimes when she touched him. *Rubio* meant blond one. Sometimes he would answer *Morena* which means dark. *Morena.* That's all she was. Something dark. Dark of skin, dark of hair, dark of eyes. But mystery can be loved as well as knowledge and there could be little doubt that Kamrowski loved her.

Nevertheless a change became evident after they had lived together for less than a year, which may not seem a long time but was actually a relationship of unprecedented duration in the life of Kamrowski. This change seemed to have several reasons, but perhaps the real one was none of those apparent. For one thing the presence of women had ceased to disturb him so greatly. That nervous block described in the beginning was now so thoroughly dissolved by virtue of the effortless association with Amada, that his libido had now begun to ask for an extended field of play. The mind of a woman no longer emasculated him. The simple half-Indian girl had restored his male dominance. In his heart he knew this and was grateful but one does not always return a gift with an outward show of devoir. He paid her back very badly. That winter season, which they spent in a southern city, he began to go out in society for the first time in his life, for he had lately become what is called a Name and received a good deal of attention. It was possible, now, to ignore the ornament at the throat of the woman and return, at least now and again, the look of her eyes without too much mortification. It was also possible to make amatory advances before she had gone to sleep.

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That winter Kamrowski began to form other attachments of more than a night's duration, one in particular with a young woman who was also a writer and a member of the urban intelligentsia. She had, alas, one defect. She wore contact lenses which she used to remove before going to bed and Kamrowski had to ask her not to put them on the table beside the bed but in the little drawer of the table. But this was an unimportant item in the affair which went along smoothly. He began to make love to this girl, Ida, more regularly than he made love to Amada. Now when Amada would turn to him on the bed, he would often avert himself from her and pretend to be sleeping. He would hear her beginning to cry beside him. Her hand would move enquiringly down his body, and once he seized her hand and slammed it roughly away from him. Then she got out of bed. He got up, too, and went into the kitchen and sat there with a pitcher of ice-water. He heard her packing her things as she had done often before. Her trunk was a military locker. The bottom of it was filled with random keepsakes such as restaurant menus, pictures of actors torn from movie magazines, post-cards from all the places they had visited in their travels. Sometimes while she was packing she would stalk into the kitchen, holding up some article such as a towel that she had filched from a hotel bathroom. Is this yours or mine? she would ask. He would shrug. She would make a terrible face at him and return to the bedroom to continue her packing. He knew that she would unpack everything in the morning. In the morning she would restore the souvenir menus and post-cards to their places about the mirror and the mantel because without him there was no place for her to go and no one to go with. He did not want to feel too sorry for her. He was enjoying himself too much to allow a shadow of contrition to weigh upon him too heavily, and so he would think to himself, for self-exoneration during such scenes. She was only a whore in a third-class hotel where I found her. Why isn't she happy? Well, I don't give a damn!

And yet he was very glad, when he had finished drinking the pitcher of ice-water, to find that she was no longer packing but had gone back to bed. Then he would make love to her more tenderly than he had for many weeks past.

It was a morning after an incident such as this that Kamrowski first discovered that the girl had begun to steal from him. Thereafter

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whenever he put on his clothes in the morning he would find his pockets lighter of money than they had been before. At first she took only silver, but as the earnings of his novel increased she began to increase the amount of her thefts, taking one dollar bills, then five and ten dollar bills. Finally Kamrowski had to accuse her of it. She wailed miserably but she did not deny it. For about a week the practice was suspended. Then it started again, first with the silver, increasing again to bills of larger denomination. He tried to thwart her by taking the money out of his pockets and hiding it somewhere about the apartment. But when he did this she would waken him in the night by her slow and systematic search for it. What are you looking for? he would ask the girl. I am looking for matches, she'd tell him. So at last he humored her in it. He only cashed small checks and let her steal what she wanted. It remained a mystery to him what she did with the money. She apparently bought nothing with it and yet it did not seem to linger in her possession. What did she want with it? She had everything that she needed or seemed to wish. Perhaps it was simply her way of paying him back for the infidelities which he was now practicing all the time.

It was late that winter of their residence in the large southern city that the ill health of Amada became apparent. She did not speak of her suffering, but she would sometimes get up in the night and light a holy candle in a transparent red glass cup. She would crouch beside it mumbling Spanish prayers with a hand pressed to her side where some pain was located. It made her furious when he got up or questioned her about it. She behaved as if she were suffering from some disgraceful secret. Mind your own business, she would snarl back at him if he asked, What is it? Hours later she would waken him again, crawling back into bed with an exhausted sigh which told him that the attack of pain had subsided. Then moved by pity he would turn to her slowly and press her to him as gently as possible so that his pressure wouldn't renew the pain. She would not go to a doctor. She said she had been to a doctor a long time ago and that he had told her she had a disease of the kidneys the same as her father had had and that there was nothing to do but try to forget it. It doesn't matter, she said, I am going to forget it.

She made an elaborate effort to conceal the attacks as they became more frequent and more severe, thinking perhaps that her

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illness would disgust him and he might forsake her completely. She would steal out of bed so cautiously that it would take her five or ten minutes to disengage herself from the covers and creep to the chair in the corner, and if she lit the prayer-candle, she would crouch over it with cupped hands to conceal the flame. It was evident to Kamrowski that the infection in her body, whatever it was, was now passing from a chronic into an acute stage. He would have been more concerned if he had not just then started to work on another novel. The girl Amada began to exist for him on the other side of a center which was his writing. Everything outside of that existed in a penumbra as shadowy forms on the further side of a flame. Days and events were uncertain. The ringing of the door bell and the telephone was ignored. Eating became irregular. He slept with his clothes on, sometimes in the chair where he worked. His hair grew long as a hermit's. He grew a beard and mustache. A lunatic brightness appeared in his eyes while his ordinarily smooth face acquired hollows and promontories and his hands shook. He had fits of coughing and palpitations of the heart which sometimes made him think he was dying and greatly speeded up his already furious tempo of composition.

Afterwards he could not remember clearly how things had been between himself and Amada during this feverish time. He ceased to make love to her, he ceased that altogether, and he was only dimly aware of her presence in the apartment. He gave her commands as if she were a servant and she obeyed them quickly and wordlessly with an air of fright. Get me coffee! he would suddenly yell at her. Play that record again, he would say, with a jerk of his thumb at the victrola. But he was not conscious of her except as a creature to carry out such commissions.

During this interval she had quit stealing his money. Most of the day she would sit at the opposite end of the wide front room in which he was working. As long as she stayed at that end of the room her presence did not distract him from his work, but if she entered unbidden his half of the room or if she asked him some question, he would yell at her furiously or even hurl a book at her. She became very quiet. When she went to the kitchen or bathroom, she would move one foot at a time, slowly and stealthily, gazing back at him to make sure he had no objection. Her face had changed, too, in the same way that his had changed. The long equine face had

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become even bonier than before and dreadfully sallow and the eyes now glittered as if they looked into a room where a great light was. She moved about with an odd stateliness which must have come from the suffering caused by the movement. One hand was now always pressed to the side that hurt her and she moved with exaggerated uprightness in defiance of the temptation to ease her discomfort by crouching. These details of her appearance he could not have noticed at the time, not consciously, and yet they came to him vividly in recollection. It was only afterwards, too, that he troubled himself to wonder how she might have interpreted this disastrous change in their way of living together. She must have thought that all affectionate feeling for her was gone and that he was now enduring her company out of pity only. She stopped stealing his money at night. For a month she sat in the corner and watched him, watched him with the dumb, wanting look of an animal in pain. Occasionally she would dare to cross the room. When he seemed to be resting from his labor, she would come to his side and run her fingers enquiringly down his body to see if he desired her, and finding out that he didn't, she would retire again speechlessly to her side of the room.

Then all at once she left him. He had spent a night out with his new blond mistress and returned to find that Amada had packed her locker-trunk and removed it from the apartment, this time in grim earnest. He made no attempt to find her. He believed that she would necessarily return of her own accord, for he could not imagine her being able to do otherwise. But she did not return to him, as the days passed, nor did any word of her reach him. He was not certain how he felt about this. He thought for a while that he might even be somewhat relieved by the resulting simplification of his life and the absence of that faint odor of disease which had lately hung sadly over the bed they had slept in. There was still always the book, sometimes loosening its grip now that the first draft was finished, but still making him insensible as a paranoiac to everyday life. During the intervals when the work dropped off, when there was discouragement or a stop for reflection, Kamrowski would take to the streets and follow strange women. He glutted his appetite with a succession of women and continually widened the latitude of his experience, till, all at once, he was filled with disgust at himself and the circus-trapeze of longing on which he had kicked himself senselessly back and forth

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since the flight of the girl he had lived with. He didn't want any more of that now or ever.

And so one night, about five months after their separation, the image of Amada stalked with a sound of trumpets through the midnight walls of his apartment. She stood like some apparition of flame at the foot of his bed, all luminous from within as an X-ray picture. He saw the tall white bones of her standing there, and he sat bolt-upright in the sweat-dampened covers and gave a loud cry: then he fell back on his face to weep uncontrollably till the coming of morning. When daylight was coming, even before the windows had turned really white, he rose to pack his valise and arrange for the trip to Laredo, to find the lost girl and bring her back into the empty room in his heart. He assumed without thinking that Laredo was where she would be, because it was where he had found her.

He was not wrong about that. She had returned to Laredo five months ago but not to the Texas Star where he had found her. The manager of the hotel pretended to have no knowledge of the girl but the Mexican porter told him that he would find her in the home of her family on the outskirts of town, in a house without number on a street without name, at the bottom of a steep hill on which stood an ice-plant.

When Kamrowski arrived at the door of the gray wooden house to which these directions took him—a building no more than a shack which leaned exhaustedly on the edge of a steep and irregular road of grey dust—all of the female family came to the door and talked excitedly among themselves, brushing him avidly up and down with their eyes, half smiling and half snarling at him like a pack of wild dogs. They seemed to be arguing almost hysterically among themselves as to whether or not this stranger should be admitted. He was so sick with longing to see the lost girl that he could not bring out the little Spanish he knew. All he could say was Amada, more and more loudly. And then all at once, from some recess of the building, a loud, hoarse voice was lifted like the crow of a cock. It had a ring of anger but the word called out was the affectionate name she used to call him. Rubio, which meant blond. He swept past the women, brushing them aside with both arms, and made for the direction from which the fierce call had come. He fairly hurled himself against the warped door and broke into a room which was all dark except for

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a vigil light in a red glass cup. He looked that way where the light in the glass cup was. There he saw her. She was lying upon a pallet arranged upon the bare floor.

It was impossible to judge her appearance in the windowless room, a sort of storage closet, with that one candle burning, especially since he had just come in from the glare of a desert sunset. He made out, gradually, that she was wearing a man's undershirt and he noticed how big her hands and her elbows were now that the arms were so emaciated, and her head seemed almost as big as the head of a horse and the familiar, coarse hair was hanging like a horse's mane about her scrawny neck and shoulders. His first emotion was fury as well as pity. What does this mean, what are you doing in here, he cried out fiercely. Mind your own business, she yelled back at him, exactly as if they had never been separated. Then he swallowed his rage at her family, still going on with their high-pitched argument beyond the door he had slammed shut. He crouched on his haunches beside the pallet and took hold of her hand. She tugged away from his grasp but not quite strongly enough to break it. She seemed to be trying to seem more alive than she was. She did not let herself entirely back down on the pallet, although he could see it was an effort for her to remain propped up on her elbow. And she did not allow her voice to drop but kept it at the same loud and harsh pitch. She did not remove her eyes from his face which she seemed to be straining to examine, but she did not return his look directly. She seemed to be staring at his nose or his mouth. There was a great bewilderment in her look, a wonder at his being there, at his coming to see her. She asked him several times, What are you doing here in Laredo? And his answer, I came here to see you, did not seem to satisfy her. At last he leaned over and touched her shoulder and said, You ought to lie back. She glared at him fiercely. I am all right, she said. Her dark eyes were now immense. All of the light that came from the ruby glass cup was absorbed in those eyes and magnified into a beam that shot into his heart and deprived that moon-like organ of all its shadows, exposing in brutal relief the barrenness of it the way that the moon's landscape, with the sun full on it, turns into a hard and flat disk whose light is borrowed. He could not endure it. He sprang from beside the pallet. He dug in his pocket and pulled out a handful of bills. Take these, he whispered

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hoarsely. He tried to stuff them into her hands. I don't want your money, she answered. Then after a slight pause she muttered, Give it to them. She jerked her head toward the door beyond which the family were now preparing noisily for supper. He felt defeated altogether. He sighed and looked down at his hands. Her own hands lifted, then, and reached falteringly toward his head. Rubio, she whispered, the word for blond. Tiredly one of her hands dropped down his body to see if he desired her, and discovering that he did not, she smiled at him sadly and let her eyes fall shut. She seemed to be falling asleep; so then he leaned over and kissed her gently at the edge of her large mouth. Morena, he whispered, which was the word for dark one. Instantly the long bony arms flung about him an embrace which took his breath. She pressed their faces painfully together, her Indian cheekbones bruising his softer flesh. Scalding tears and the pressure of those gaunt arms broke finally all the way through the encrusted shell of his ego, which had never before been broken all the way through, and he was released. He was let out of the small but apparently rather light and comfortable room of his known self into a space that lacked the comfort of limits. He entered a space of bewildering dark and immensity, and yet not dark, of which light is really the darker side of the sphere. He was not at home in it. It gave him unbearable fright, and so he crawled back. He crawled back out of the gaunt embrace of the girl. I will come back in the morning, he said to the girl as he rose from beside the pallet and crawled back into the small room he was secure in. . . .

When he returned in the morning, the atmosphere of his reception was different. There was an air of excitement in the place that he could not fathom, and all of the women seemed to have on their best clothes. He thought perhaps it was because of the money that he had left in the sick-room. He started to cross to that room, but the old woman plucked his sleeve and pointed toward another. She led him into the parlor of the house and he was astonished to find that they had moved the girl there. Because he did not understand their speech, he could not realize at first that she had died in the night: this he did not realize until he had picked up her hand, nearly as dark as a negro's, and found it cool and stiffened. They had dressed her in white, a night-gown of clean white linen that shone with starch, and when he released the hand, the oldest woman advanced

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and placed it carefully back in its former position on the flat bosom.

He noticed also that the odor of sickness was gone, or possibly lost in the odor of burning wax, for a great many candles had been brought into the room and set in ruby glass cups on the window ledges. The blinds had been lowered against the meridian glare of the flat desert country, but the glare filtered through pin-point perforations in the old fabric so that each blind was like a square of green sky with stars shining in it. The mourners assembled there were mostly neighbors' children, the smallest ones naked, the larger dressed in grey rags. One little girl was holding a home-made doll, roughly cut out of wood and painted into a grotesque semblance of human infancy. Coarse black hair had been attached to the head. It seemed somehow like an effigy of the dead girl. Unable to look upon the actual face and its now intolerable mystery, Kamrowski stole to the side of the half-naked child and gently and timidly thrust his hand toward the doll. He touched the coarse black hair of the doll with a finger. The child complained faintly and hugged the doll closer to her. Kamrowski began to tremble. He felt that his hand must keep in touch with the doll. He must not let the child move away with her precious possession, and so with one hand he stroked the head of the child while with the other hand's finger he kept in touch with the familiar black hair. But still the child edged away, withdrawing from his caress and regarding him with huge distrustful brown eyes.

Meanwhile a whispered consultation seemed to be going on among the women. It grew louder with excitement and finally the grandmother, with an abrupt decision, separated herself from the group and approached Kamrowski and cried out to him in English, Where is Amada's money, where is her money?

He stared at the old woman stupidly. What money? She made a fierce spitting noise as she thrust toward him a handful of yellow papers. He looked down at them. They seemed to be telegraph forms. Yes, they were all money-orders, sent from the city in which he had lived with Amada. The sums were those she had stolen at night from his pockets.

Kamrowski looked wildly about for a way to escape. The women were closing about him like a wolf-pack, now all jabbering at once. He made for the outer door. Beside the door the little girl with the

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doll appeared to him dimly. Impulsively he reached out and snatched the doll from the child as he ran past her, into the dusty brilliance of the road. He ran as fast as he could up the steep and irregular dirt road with the wailing child running behind him, feeling only a need of hanging onto the child's grotesque play-thing till he was alone somewhere and able to cry.

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William Burford

CEDAR OF CEDARS

Love is not taught by taut, slender vases, precious antique
Pieces of porcelain for the thin, the so easily bendable
Long stems of a florist's show-window roses. Rather does Love
Learn from the giant urn raising in cement by iron portals
Such hardy tree as cedar. Made of the same strong substance
A lion guards this individual garden; a king so constructed
He can be heard to growl how prepared paws are to sprawl
Whichever guest to the palace would twist a tough sprig
From the tree. Greenness may be given to brush an entering
Ruffled cheek, or weave summer shade on the warm knocker.

This greenness will not wither, as leaves fixed in vase water
Will, when their form is shattered by a crass, capricious hand.
This green was born contained in that that cracks knuckles.
The Japanese tend thousand-year-old trees in brass bowls;
But theirs are dwarfs any child can rip out. Ours stays.
Oh cedar upright from your urn, if your lion should sleep some
Night, and the skillful visitor creep to a quick snipping
Of your plumage; overnight, as can such sapped perennials,
Each branch could bandage itself, grow out to cope with a new
Sun's heat feed on light that would, could, find no less of Love.

Oh cedar strong in your strong urn! Cedar of the cedars
Of Lebannon! You are true to lift yourself upon a pedestal,
Neck of this deep basin-head that holds your earth intact.
Thus you tell all the strong who root your species out
For robbing light from grass that goats might graze on,
Grow more mohair for the mills; you, cedar, and your lion

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Tell that though much wool is requisite against the winter,
One cedar shall be spared to stand against the winters of the heart;
Stand for this kitten the great beast lets meander over his mane,
Struggle up his tail, to the tree's thick roof no snow sifts through.

William Carlos Williams

THE LION

1

Traffic, the lion, the sophisticate,
facing the primitive, alabaster,
the new fallen snow
stains its chastity the new shade.

Use defames! the attack disturbs our sleep.

This is the color of the road, the color
of the lion, sand color

—to follow the lion, of use or usage,
even to church! the bells achime
above the fallen snow!

—all follow the same road, apace.

2

Winter, the churned snow, the lion
flings the woman, taking her
by the throat upon his gullied
shoulders—shaking the weight fast
and unmolested plunges with her
among the trees—where the whiteness

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sparkles—to devour her there:
transit to uses: where the traffic
mounts, a chastity packed with lewdness,
a rule, dormant, against the loosely
fallen snow—the thick muscles
working under the skin, the head
like a tree-stump, gnawing: chastity
to employment, lying down bloodied
to bed together for the last time.

POEM

Love being what it is, full of betrayals,
Rich and ripe; love being filled with trials,
Juries that slander and black ravens' breasts
That swim like swans in the night. Life being
A true well-motored pageant, the kind
That rain pours on, making the gilt run white,
Streamers hang dankly, and pure colors merge.
Love being, life being, the words
Of dissatisfied people; it is not impossible
That we should desire nature above all,
Regarding humans as somehow outside the show,
Late arrivers, mere artifacts, pure rationals.
Let them look, let them think,
Their hopes are retinal.

Ruth Herschberger

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Ruben Dario

MELANCHOLIA

Friend, you who see the light, for me find
Mine, that am blind. I walk in the dark, and go without aim;
Between storms and struggles is my lane;
Void of harmony and in dreams blind.

This is my crime, Lord. The poetry
Of a thousand ferreted points, harsh cruel armor
That I endure around my soul. The bloody thorns shower
Me with falling drops of melancholy.

Thus I go, through this bitter world, blind not strong,
At times it seems the road is very long,
And then again that it is almost gone. . . .

And, in this hesitation of respite and agony,
I am weighted with troubles which I cannot carry.
Do you not hear the falling tears of my melancholy?

(*Translated from the Spanish by Nancy Leeds Wynkoop*)

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Stephen Spender

THE LIFE OF LITERATURE*

During my last year at Oxford, I became secretary of the University English Club. This enabled me to enlarge my acquaintanceship with writers by inviting, amongst others, Walter de la Mare, Edmund Blunden, J. C. Squire, Humbert Wolfe, J. B. Priestley, William Plomer, to speak. I began to realize now that the poet in our time is essentially a man with another job, tired, overburdened, who cannot live from his poetry, and is in danger of clinging to it out of self-esteem. All these poets, with a great sympathy for youth, were most friendly in revealing themselves, generously overlooked the inconvenience they had been caused by the wrong advice I had written them about trains. They often delivered their sad advice on the literary life, like ghosts in Purgatory, conscious of comparative failure of their illusions but still glowing with the faint halo of a vision. When he heard that I wished to write poetry, Edmund Blunden exclaimed: "Whatever you do, don't review books as I did," as Paolo and Francesca relate that it was reading a book which led to their downfall. And J. S. Squire at the end of a rather convivial evening eyed me with a wavering severity to ask: "What do you intend to do with your life, young man?" "Write poetry." "Then you will be like me," he sighed, as one of those shades warns before surrendering himself to the flames. "You will write poetry until you are twenty or twenty-one. Then you will fall in love with a fair young girl and you will write more poetry. Then you will marry that girl and you will write reviews and journalism. Then you will have a fine young strapping baby, and you will write more reviews and journalism. Then, when you are my age, you will think: 'Well, perhaps, after all, to have married that maiden and had those children is worth more than to have written 400 sonnets.' " And Humbert Wolfe said:

* The first part of this chapter from an autobiographical work in progress appeared in the November issue.

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"Well if you have a job in the Civil Service—which there's no reason why you shouldn't have, if you get a First like me—and if you are able to sell ten-thousand copies of your poems, like I did of my last volume, you will be able to write poetry," and he continued to talk of the books he had sold in the fatally transparent tones of those writers who seek to bury their critics under their public. J. B. Priestley, having elicited the same reply to the same question, advised: "Well, it's not at all a bad idea to start with a little poetry if you want to write something solid and serious later on. I did myself. Now I . . . . " and he went on to tell me that as a consequence of his early poetic discipline at this moment trains were being chartered in the North of England and loaded with copies of *The Good Companions.*

Only Walter de la Mare, perhaps because he had already so much the air of being an inhabitant of the shades, seemed quite confident in his modesty and modest in his confidence. In his charming way, de la Mare can make admissions far more damaging than those of the other writers I have mentioned. "It's strange isn't it," he said, "that I have a kind of sixth sense by which if my name is printed in a newspaper, I know at once and turn immediately to it." De la Mare has the profound innocence which accepts and wonders at every phenomenon, and is never shocked. Many years after this, I met at his house a young American, a poet and story teller, who told a long story about how he had met a sailor in London who had gone home with him and then stolen all his money and clothes. De la Mare listened to this story, asked questions, smiled, a though it were a narrative in the realm of dreams told by Shepherd Nod. Later I saw something of the American who perhaps liked de la Mare and myself because we both understood him, though perhaps for different reasons: de la Mare from enchantment, I from disenchantment. And when, after being thrown in and out of prison, he took his own life, de la Mare and I entered into some correspondence about his literary remains. But it was not until I read a passage of real insight in the Introduction to de la Mare's anthology *Love,* that I realized how profoundly this most dreamy and unworldly of poets had accepted and understood the underlying actuality of the whole episode. Recently I heard a story of de la Mare which charmed me greatly. An old friend of his had been to visit him and was a little

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disconcerted because de la Mare asked him dozens of question throughout the whole afternoon, without ever waiting for an answer. As he was going, the friend reflected sadly: "After all, de la Mare is getting very old." At the door de la Mare said: "I know I've asked many many questions this afternoon and never waited for an answer. But don't you agree that it's much more important to ask questions than to answer them?"

During the period of my early meetings with the Great, I experienced those agonies of longing for their friendship which can hardly be described to those who do not understand what it is for a young man to start trembling when he recognizes in a crowd a face of which he has seen the photograph in the newspapers; or who does not know what it is to be seized with longing as with the most violent thirst, to be spoken to by the best-known person in a room. I ask myself whether such an emotion is simply that of falling in love. But I do not think so. Essential to it are shame and humiliation which are different from love.

By the time I left Oxford, my conception of contemporary literature had greatly changed. I was now almost exclusively interested in one kind of writing—"the modern." My appreciation was now confined to a very few modern writers; especially those who had modernist tendencies: James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Robert Graves, Laura Riding, Ernest Hemingway, Edith Sitwell, Ezra Pound, Henry Green, Herbert Read, to name a few. There were a few writers, not experimental artists whom I also admired: W. B. Yeats and D. H. Lawrence, to name two. Then there were a number of books I read with great interest but which did not seem to me to contribute anything to the literary experimentalism which I thought of as the significant purpose of contemporary literature: I include among these all the very interesting books of experiences of the war, including T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* a book of great factual and autobiographical interest, but written in a style improvised magnificently for the occasion by an eccentric adventurous don without a natural gift of style.

I judged the "modern" indeed not so much by the subject matter as by the arrangement of words on the printed page: an arrangement concentrated on producing clear and sharp images, avoiding unnecessary words and clichés, suggesting thought through

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concrete sensuous experience rather than by abstraction; an arrangement which was sensitive to the illogical, to dissociations of thought and suggestion, and which above all, returned always to the force of the single word related to other words rather than to the paragraph or the stanza in which the words were lost. The modern movement reconsidered the word as the basis of all form. The modernists were prepared to break down the stanza pattern, and even the order of grammar, in order to intensify the force of single words.

My admiration of the moderns, as the list of writers I have given will show, was rather undiscriminating. I was fascinated by the implicit logic of this literature which seemed to me then to undermine all other writing, even perhaps all the subject matter of literature by its extraordinary concentration on verbal technique as an end in itself, just as abstract painting seemed to undermine the aims of all other painting. Yet experimental writing was often divorced almost entirely from subject matter: and this made it extremely difficult to criticize, any more than one can easily criticize one abstract painting as better than another. In my own mind, despite the fascination which experimentation exercised on me, I felt that a divorce from subject matter (such as one finds in the writing of Gertrude Stein) was a divorce from critical standards, from the values of natural truth. This prevented me from experimenting greatly when I was young. My attachment to subjects was my attachment to truth, and I could not turn a subject into a verbal experiment. In fact, experimental literature tends to become purely verbal: literature with a great subject matter tends to be expressed in the easiest form at the writer's hand, like a letter to a friend. The literature of the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties tended to fall between two stools. On the one hand there was the verbalism of the experimentalists: on the other hand there were books such as Aldous Huxley's novels, written intelligently and with a certain ease, but which were hammered together according to the pattern of the conventional novel. When the experimenters wanted to say something, they themselves tended to abandon their experiments: witness the autobiographical books of Gertrude Stein.

Today after a decade of experiments, the impulse of modernism seems to be exhausted. But the problem of creating styles in our modern art is not solved by what are essentially compromises such as

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the virtuosity of form in W. H. Auden, the cross between journalism and Gertrude Stein of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Music is perhaps always the most logical of the arts which most clearly defines the searching for a style of a decade, and I think the characteristic compromises of today are to be found in the great and sudden commercial successes of modern music: the British opera, the American symphony.

So my original preoccupation with the poetry of the branch of coral extended in the reader's mind, had been transformed. The change had come about partly as a result of experience, partly as the result of contemporary influences: the two are perhaps inseparable. For the literary experiences of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* had broken down in my mind the barriers which isolated a certain type of purely poetic experience from an area of modern experience which I thought to be unpoetic. When Auden said that the most beautiful walk at Oxford was along the canal by the gasworks, I knew there was sense in his affectation, for I knew that what he meant was that the gasworks and the Oxford countryside were parts of the same whole experience of modern life, and that the discovery of beauty within experience was an act of will. As he pointed out, no landscape was beautiful without a human spectator: the beautiful, the significant were created by minds: therefore the business of the spectator was to make his environment significant, to act upon it.

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
Musing upon the king my father's wreck
And on the king my father's death before him.

When I read these lines, the barriers between an area supposedly poetic and one supposedly unpoetic within the actual world, had been broken down in my mind. The untainted poetic pure images had mingled with the images of the world, and to try to write the pure poetry would now not be to enter a fortress but to abandon poetic experience.

The change which had taken place in my consciousness at this time was decisive, dangerous, perhaps even fatal to my work. For

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if I had been able to continue to exist in the "fortress of the poetic," I think I might have achieved something small but beautiful. Once the barriers which divided the poetic from the unpoetic experience had broken down every deeply felt experience had either to become part of my poetic experience or else to destroy the poetry in me. From now on, poetry was the test of my whole experience of life, not just of a specially literary part of it. Poetry must enter even into my experience of politics or be driven out by politics.

I believe that the experience I have just described is important, bcause it is true also of the experience of other modern poets. One can see fairly clearly that the development of several modern poets is divided into three periods. A first period, when the poetry is integrated within the idea of a poetic world of experiences which seem intrinsically more poetic than other kinds of experience, and which owe much to the memories of childhood and the literary experiences of adolescence. Then there follows a period in which the fortress of a poetic virginity is shattered, the flood gates of the world are opened and the poet must either integrate this flood of gross, chaotic, brash worldly experience within his work or be destroyed as a poet by it: then there follows a period of reintegration, of building a new fortress against the flood.

To take Yeats, Eliot and Auden, the three most significant poets of their generations as examples, one sees each of these three stages in different phases of their work. In Yeats the first phase is that of the Celtic Twilight, the second that of his preoccupation with Irish nationalism, the third the Tower: symbol of a spiritual fortress which he constructed against the chaos of his time, from stones of mystical philosophy, occultism and quattrocento art. In Eliot, the first phase of a pure poetic experience is more difficult to trace: but is not the social irony of the early Eliot a kind of skin which covers over a very pure experience of the poetic?

> *We have lingered in the chambers of the sea*
> *By sea-girls wreathed with sea weed red and brown*
> *Till human voices wake us, and we drown.*

The effort to preserve the "chambers of the sea" breaks down in *The Waste Land* and the flooding human voices have to become the content of the poetry. The later development of Eliot is the

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construction of his tower of Christian belief within the waste land. And so with W. H. Auden: the early poetry in which the subject is only the peg to hang the pure poetry on, then the poetry of the consciousness of social and individual problems, then the painful effort to construct a philosophy to withstand this inrush of consciousness.

Thus the world of an actuality which pressed on me had to become poetry in me, or I must cease to be a poet. Poetic experience was no longer separate from other experience: nor could I draw for ever on the poetry of childhood. Yet the invasion of the disorder and chaos, the unresolved problem of the world, threatened the life of the imagination. Poetry can escape from actuality into another kind of reality, the power of the imagination to create its own world, but it cannot just become a passive receptacle for the unresolved problems of the actual

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies. . . .

Keats died when he was in the grips of the same problem—the modern problem—and since then every poet endowed with sensibility has been confronted by it.

During the nineteen-thirties I attempted to solve the problem in my own work by a faith that there were forces within society which could transform chaos and which I might imagine in my poetry. But such an attempt makes poetry dependent on whether or not there really are such forces in the world. If there really were a social revolution which could transform the world, then there could be a Shelley capable of writing revolutionary poetry. Ultimately the weakness of Shelley's social poetry is not in Shelley but in society itself. And if Shelley seems unrealistic and an idealist, in fact, he is no less realistic and no more in the clouds than a Maiakovsky or an Aragon or an Eluard: because all these poets are betrayed by the social movements which they trust will change the world. It is their revolution which betrays them. Until I realized this, I had for a time one foot in poetry, and one in politics, imagining that there was a politics which could solve the problems of a disordered experience in my poetry, and that my poetry could help such a revolutionary politics. A history which the poets were certainly not able

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to control—least of all in their poetry—prevented the social poetry based on a new faith in humanity from being anything but a phase in the development of the work of a few poets during the nineteen-thirties.

Poetry must inevitably seek for an inner strength independent of historic events which poets cannot hope to influence. At the same time within the fabric of the poet's world there should be as great an experience of the problems of actuality as the poetry can bear without actuality tearing the fabric apart. The greater the tension between the centrifugal forces of actuality and the centripetal forces of the poet's imaginative power in constructing his world, the greater the vitality of the experience within the poetry.

But for certain writers, the construction of a tower which shuts out the world—even though constructed of the fabric of the world—is an impossible and perhaps even an undesirable aim. For them, the attempt to make an impregnable interior world of art would seem artificial, an interruption of the constant interrelation between experiences from outside and the adjustments of the inner life which can only result in forming a coherent pattern at the expense of shutting out the world. Such writers should really be accounted autobiographical artists who create their own autobiography in mythical language.

Even at the period which I have been describing, the autobiographical artists interested me more than the purists. What interested me, was the tension between art and life, not the complete resolution of the problems of life within the illusion of art. Thus I cared passionately for the music of Beethoven, the painting, and even more the letters of, Van Gogh, the stories and poems of D. H. Lawrence. There are supreme moments in Beethoven's music, when he seems to seize on what I call the unresolved problem of an experience and force it back with one of those trills of his last period, springing coils of sound which hold away the destructive forces and allow the voice which transcends the experience to emerge above and within the trill. And it is possible in one's thought to confuse the vision of the paintings of Van Gogh with certain passages in his letters or even with certain of his pietistic acts which share an ungainly beauty with his still lives of a chair, or a pair of boots.

In D. H. Lawrence the struggle of the individual mind to relate itself to real objects and to create that unresolved tension as art is

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more evident than in any other modern writer. Lawrence could never have compared the "evening spread out against the sky" to "a patient etherized upon a table." He could not have done so because such an image is too complete a triumph of the vision of the poet who sees nature in terms of his own spiritual condition to have satisfied Lawrence. The element of tension between the reality of the evening and the poet is absent, the evening is swallowed up as it were within the poet's sensitivity, and the respect for the external nature of the evening has disappeared. Really it is the poet who is like a patient etherized upon a table, who, when he looks at the evening sees himself spread out on the sky. Nor could Lawrence ever have written:

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form of any natural thing
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy emperor awake
Or set upon a golden bough to sing. . . . .

An exquisite wish, exquisitely expressed, but the expression of a defiant artificiality against the reality of flesh and blood and nature.

Lawrence, despite his great psychological insight, is too impatient ever to have constructed a character who is wholly convincing and complete psychologically, in fact his psychology is an instrument for criticizing contemporary society through the medium of characters whom he invents for this purpose. His philosophy of sexuality is imperfectly developed and often leads him into taking up uncharitable attitudes such as his contempt for one of his characters (Lord Chatterley) because he happens to be a cripple. Yet all his faults can be counted as self-imposed limitations is order to narrow his focus onto one aim: awareness of the "otherness," the externality of nature and people. For Lawrence the outside world is not a mental experience taking place inside the heads of observers and capable of being realized creatively by artists as part of the mental order of an old tradition adapting itself to living in modern conditions. He does not want to make nature into a human spiritual possession, a philosophy, a consolation, as Wordsworth does, nor into a field of symbols which present man with opportunities of identifying his own mental states with them, as the symbolists do. For him literature

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is a kind of pointer to what is outside literature, and therefore outside the individual's cerebral life. This outsideness of reality is for Lawrence the waters of baptism in which man can be reborn: and therefore to make it an inside symbol is a kind of blasphemy to him, which sets him against nearly all modern writers who share in common a passion for turning all the exterior world into symbols of their interior philosophies. This is, indeed, the essence of the philosophizing passion, the metaphysical anxiety of modern literature.

Lawrence's "dark gods" are symbols of an inescapable mystery: the point of comprehension where the senses are aware of an otherness in objects which extends beyond the senses, and the possibility of a relationship between the human individual and the forces outside himself, which is capable of creating in him a new state of mind. Lawrence is the most hopeful modern writer, because he looks beyond the human to the non-human, which can be discovered within the human. He does not, like T. S. Eliot, like Proust or like other writers who discover something absolute in the condition of civilization, leave the individual like a child with the scattered achievements of civilization fallen down in his mind like a child's bricks. For these writers the world seems to consist of a civilization, once great, but which now hypnotizes humanity with its fall, involving his spiritual and physical life in that fall, and offering within this world, no way out. But for Lawrence the world is not just man alone with his civilization. There are men, there are women, there is a rotten civilization falling into ruins, hypnotized with its own politics as the writers are hypnotized by past culture, and there is the whole geographical world which contains a great many civilizations besides the West, and enormous areas of comparatively uncrowded and undeveloped country. Now at the back of Lawrence's mind there is always the idea that if your civilization, your culture betrays you, you can take up your bed and walk, you can build a new house out of the ruins of the old, you can go to the untamed jungle.

So Lawrence is a great releaser, a great dehypnotizer from the enslavement of mental worlds. This is not just a conclusion which I draw from his theories, it is an effect which I am in contact with when I read a page of his descriptive prose—almost any page, which is so much part of his world that it will pour itself out onto the pages of a letter to a friend:

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Between the ilex tree and the bare, purplish elms, a gleaming segment of all England, the dark plough-land and wan grass, and the blue, hazy heap of the distance, under the accomplished morning.

So the day has taken place, all the visionary business of the day. The young cattle stand in the straw of the stack-yard, the sun gleams on their white fleece, the eyes of Io, and the man with the side-whiskers carries more yellow straw into the compound. The sun comes in all down one side, and above, in the sky, all the gables and grey-stone chimney stacks are floating in pure dreams.

There is threshed wheat smouldering in the great barn, the fire of life; and the sound of the threshing machine, running, drumming.

The threshing-machine, running, drumming, waving its steam in a corner of a great field, the rapid nucleus of darkness beside the yellow ricks; and the rich plough-land comes up, ripples up in endless grape-colored ripples, like a tide of procreant desire: the machine sighs and drums, wind blows the chaff in little eddies, blows the clothes of the men on the ricks against their limbs: the men on the stacks in the wind against a bare blue heaven, their limbs blown clean in contour naked shapely animated fragments of earth active in heaven.

Lawrence's thought has much in common with that of Blake: Blake in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* accuses the priests and authorities of the established religions of his time of having robbed the trees and streams in nature of their nymphs and fauns, robbed them that is to say of their externality, their otherness and of their local genius whereby through direct contact with them men could come in touch through their senses with that "otherness" of what is outside themselves; and turned them into the generalized abstractions of official religion which is really the disguised will of the priests to impose their order in the name of the gods whom they have robbed of their immediate authenticity. In our time it is the high priests of a religion of art, Henry James, Proust, James Joyce, the symbolists, right down to our contemporaries, who have robbed the local deities of their outsideness and turned the external into the symbols of an interior shrine of art. Like Blake, Lawrence praised a relationship between men and women which created "the lineaments of satisfied desire," a relationship of fulfilment rather than possession, in which two human beings are brought together in awareness of the diffierence which separates them.

What I am saying here has nothing to do with what is called "literary criticism." Lawrence is a good writer, but the enormous

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debt of gratitude which a whole generation owes him because he has helped them to make for themselves a more hopeful attitude towards life, does not make him a better writer than those great talents which have devoted their lives to producing an effect of profound spiritual and physical discouragement. One cannot complain that the greatest talents are those which are most bound up with the values of a civilization which is falling to pieces.

When I went to Berlin, in 1930, Christopher Isherwood—whom I saw nearly every day there—was not the successful writer and personality he has subsequently become. He was comparatively poor, and almost unrecognized. He had published one novel *All the Conspirators,* which had been remaindered, and was working on a second, *The Memorial.* During the years when I was often in Berlin, he lived in various parts of the town, of which the best was in the neighborhood of the Nollendorfplatz, and the worst that of the Hallesches Tor, an area of slum tenements. He lived very poorly, scarcely ever spending more than 60 pfennigs (about eightpence) on a meal. During this time, when I had meals almost every day with him I ate such things as horseflesh, lung soup and other kinds of food, which for some years ruined my digestion, as they had long ago ruined his.

Very soon my relationship with Christopher fell into a routine. I would leave my own bed sitting room, situated in the slightly more luxurious Motzstrasse, walk along the shabby-grand streets whose walls were covered with concrete images of German eagles, their beaks falling off, and their feathers decaying into grimy scales, to the Nollendorfplatz, and then go to the little street leading out of the Nollendorfstrasse, where Christopher had a room. When I had climbed up two or three flights of stairs whose inner walls had the color and the over-sweet damp odor of an old cardboard box, and when I had rung the front door bell of the flat where Christopher had his room, and when that door was opened by Christopher's landlady, Fräulein Thurau, with pendulous jaws and breasts, the watchdog of the Herr Ishyvoo world, I had entered the scene of Christopher's novels. Fräulein Thurau with a *"Guten Tag, Herr Spender,"* of a cordial kind which recognized that I was one of those rare friends of Christopher whom she did not reckon a robber, a blackmailer or a wastrel, perhaps even that I was a "good influence," would add

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"Herr Ishyvoo ist noch nicht fertig," with a rolling of her eyes which indicated the full implications of the word *fertig,* or *"Herr Ishyvoo hat Besuch,"* with a sombre humorousness which equally implied a double meaning. I would then be shown into the room which was the very center of Fräulein Thurau's universe, a reception room, a dining room, a hall, as one might choose to regard it, a room with faded impressive furniture out of which all the doors of the other rooms in the flat radiated. Here on a wide double-chair with a tapestried seat, in front of a table covered with a massive velvet table cloth from which huge tassels hung down to the carpet, I would sit among the shored up wreckage of Fräulein Thurau's former grandeur, waiting an unconscionably long time for Christopher to appear. While I was waiting, one or another of the characters of Christopher's as yet unwritten novels would probably emerge from one of the radiating doors, perhaps Bobbi the bar tender, or perhaps, if I was lucky, Sally Bowles and dart across the room in dishevelment: for Christopher lived in this apartment surrounded by his creations, like one of those portraits of a writer by a painter, where, while the novelist sits meditating in a chair, all the creatures of his fiction turn around him, subtly revealed within an umber cloud which would be not unlike the rich dusty lighting of Fräulein Thurau's apartment.

After some time Christopher would appear, probably in his shirt sleeves, holding a razor in his hand, to say that he was sorry but last night had been terrible, he had not slept, but now he would be ready in a few minutes. Ten minutes later he would reappear remarkably transformed with a neatness of the cuffs emphasized by the way in which he often held his wrists extended slightly apart from his body. His hair was brushed in a boyish lick over his forehead, below which his round shining eyes had a steadiness which seemed to come from the strain of effort, as though their feat of balancing themselves in Christopher's face at the same time supported the whole world which he saw. They were the eyes of someone who when he is a passenger in an aeroplane thinks that the machine is kept in the air by an act of his will, and that unless he continues to look steadily in front of him, it will fall instantly to the ground. These eyes were under sandy sharp-angled eyebrows which added to the impression of a strained schoolboy. The mouth with its

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very deep vertical lines at the corners was that of a tragicomic Christ. When in the world of Fräulein Thurau's reception room one looked at this mouth one expected it at any moment to give a sour grimace, and then to say quietly: "It is finished." And in fact, this was the hour of grave pronouncements. "That is the last time I ever go to the Cosy Corner. They can sink or swim without me." Or: "Do you know what that bitch Sally said to me last night?" "No." She said: "Perhaps one day, Christopher darling, you will write something really great, like Noel Coward." Or: "Mr. Norris has been caught." Or: "I have given Fräulein Thurau notice. I will not live under the same roof as Bobbi an instant longer." Or, merely, and most grimly of all: "Otto wants a new suit."

I entered so completely into Christopher's moods that although I was partly entertained by these pronouncements, they also inspired me with a certain apprehension, and, as we went down the stairs into the street, I felt the oppression of the silence which follows fateful news. Secretly I was disappointed by the fact that Christopher's dramas rarely ended with complete catharsis. All the people who had fallen into disgrace were soon taken back into favour, for Christopher, so far from being the self-effacing spectator called Herr Ishyvoo in his novels, was, as is obvious, really the center of his characters, and neither could they exist without him nor he without them.

We would then have a meal consisting of watery soup followed by some frightful meat. Eating such food was a kind of penance which Christopher's psychology imposed on him and to which he attached an unstated but disciplinary importance of which I was aware. When sometimes, if I was alone, I went to one of the pleasant restaurants with outdoor gardens in the Kurfürstendamm, and had a meal costing 1 mark 50, or if, still more indulgent, I went to one of the excellent Russian restaurants in Berlin with Roger Sessions, or my brother Michael, I felt like Judas Iscariot.

After our lunch there was a relaxation of our regime, for we then walked to a shop near the Bahnhof-am-Zoo where we bought a packet of toffee. So regular were our appearances at this shop that on seeing us enter the door a girl assistant would rush behind the counter, fetch the packet of sweets, hand it to us and receive one mark in payment, all without a word. Perhaps it was the influence of Christopher which had this effect, because I do not believe it

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would have happened to me if I were alone. In fact, in his own neighborhood, Christopher had trained most of the shop-people to spring into automatic, swift silent action so soon as he appeared at the shop door, as though he were a human switch and they machines upon electric rails. When a certain grocer refused to respond in this manner, Christopher meted out revenge. He bought all his groceries at a store a few doors away, had them packed as bulkily as possible, and thus laden, would walk very slowly, bowed down with his groceries, past the erring grocer's shop, hoping thus to break his spirit.

It may seem that there was an inconsistency about our extreme economies and the purchase of the sweets. This is quite true. But I think that Christopher regarded the sweets as, in their way, another penance, an excess ruining his teeth which had a small spiritual significance in his domain of heaven and damnation. What he would have regarded as inexcusable would have been a "balanced diet," for at this time Auden and he were in full revolt against all forms of hygiene. In any case, iced coffees and toffee had an exorbitant place in our budgets, and once Christopher said to me when he was complaining about money: "If I could suddenly see now in front of me the Niagara of iced coffees which I have drunk during the past year, then I would understand where all my money goes."

Eating our toffees, we would then, if the weather were fine, take a train to the Grunewald where we would walk among the pine trees or along the pleasant shores of the lake. We walked a great deal in Berlin, and my memory of the stories which Christopher told me are mingled with the sandy Grunewald, and the wide, gray streets of Berlin. Although Berlin was ugly, it had the saving grace of being fantastic, and, moreover, it was not unpleasant. It was one of the few towns in Europe where Spring came right into the city marching in two columns of plane trees down the Kurfürstendamm.

When we had got out of the train and were walking through the Grunewald with the flat, white, almost Moroccan modernist houses gleaming through the brown-green trees, and with the almost naked bathers lying on the flint-gray grass—the relentlessly handsome German youths with their arms round their doughy girls—Christopher talked. He told me the plot of his novel—The Lost—and day after day against the background of the pine-trees, the lakes, or the streets, I witnessed that strange transformation taking place in his mind,

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where the real becomes the malleable in art, the garrulous and shabby people those amusing entertainers who are characters in fiction.

Like all very entertaining people, Christopher could occasionally be depressive, silent or petulant. Sometimes he would sit in a room refusing to say a word. This was one of his most powerful effects. Sometimes he was in a Dostoievskian mood of gloom, or a Baudelairean one of self-damnation. About once a fortnight he was very hypochondriac, and we would go to the doctor as though to the executioner, imagining he was condemned to a fatal illness. Sometimes he was broke, and we would force ourselves to think of ways in which he might earn money. He gave German lessons, he translated, he occasionally even did a little journalism, but in the Germany of 1930 you not only had to work very hard to earn money, you also had to be a financial genius to get paid.

In the early stages of my friendship with Christopher, I was attracted to him by a sense of the adventure of his life. His renunciation of England, his poverty, his friendships, the freedom of his life, his writing, all seemed to me heroic, and I remember that when I went away for a few weeks we corresponded rather in the spirit of Polar explorers one of whom had returned for a brief visit to civilization. Then the relationship changed and I realize now that on my side it was vicarious: I was living on his experiences and intensity. I became dependent on him. I saw most things through his eyes, I wanted him to approve of everything I did, and everyone I knew. I would introduce friends to him because I wanted to see them through his eyes, although I knew that if they liked him and he them, they would probably be drawn as it were from the circumference of my dependence to him as a centre, would cease to be interested in me and devote themselves to him. In a way, I even wanted this to happen. It was an aspect of my feeling that I must tell Christopher everything, offer up my every experience to his intelligence.

At this stage of my life, to make small demands on my friends seemed to me an act of betrayal, which shows, I suppose, how little confidence I had in their friendship. For instance, to have said to Christopher that I would leave Berlin for a few weeks and go by myself for a few weeks to Rome, would have seemed unthinkable. I would not have been able to formulate the words in which one ex-

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plains such a simple decision. And yet there was not the slightest reason why I should not have done so, except that Christopher had so much the air of being a heroic captain facing terrible storms and surrounded by a volunteer crew of potential characters in novels which he would one day write. But although Christopher was certainly a dominating personality, I was more or less the same with everyone. If an acquaintance would ask me to meet him at some street corner in the middle of a town, and did not appear, I would wait for three hours lest he should arrive and be inconvenienced at not finding me: then, when he did appear, I would think that after all perhaps now he would assume that I had left, and I would feel apologetic for making him feel guilty. Moreover, these very traits of behavior in myself which today I would find touching in a young person, I despised. So I lived in a kind of vicious circle or relationships in which there was always a reason for proving to myself that in every situation I was in the wrong. This lasted for many years.

In fact, a certain lack of fundamental independence does put one in the wrong in all possible situations, because it means that one is making demands on oneself which the other person would not regard as reasonable, and thus one is putting him under an obligation which he does not wish to recognize. All this may appear complicated, but nothing is more complicated than the scruples of the timid.

Perhaps my greatest debt to Christopher is that he gave me confidence in my work. He was more than a rebel who defied parents, conventional morality, and so on. He had also created for himself a mental atmosphere in which he breathed and worked freely and where he loved his friends and admired their work, without caring about judgments which were hostile to them. He was very sure in his judgment and absolutely clear about his likes and dislikes. Auden had so much confidence in him that he submitted all his poems to Christopher for approval and destroyed all those which he did not care for. In Christopher's mind my work really existed as something worthy of consideration, apart from all other judgments, which I could remain almost indifferent about, so long as he cared.

Christopher had no dealings with abstractions, generalizations, evasions. He saw everyone as a personality whom he liked or disliked quite apart from his pretensions. All talk about ideas and culture excited his suspicions. He disliked all discussion of ideas, resented my

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going often to concerts. When a girl friend of ours explained that she was a student of Art History, he looked at her vaguely and said in a dreamy voice: "Oh, yes, Art, that must be wonderful." This insistence on dealing with everyone and everything on the level of personalities was perhaps exaggerated, but it was remarkable how frequently Christopher pricked the bubble of people's self-esteem and reduced them to a giggling bundle of confessed weaknesses and desires.

Christopher is the only person I have known who showed people up in a way that made them seem more and not less sympathetic to themselves. He had insight into what people wanted from life, which usually had a disconcerting simplicity: the simple thing they wanted and the simplicity they were. I always misunderstood people because I believed what they wanted me to believe about them, whether or not this was sympathetic to me. Thus on the first occasion when we met Sally Bowles I thought she was sophisticated and pretentious, as she sat on a little "pouf," and, whilst drinking Fritz's black coffee in his sitting room talked with an incredible air of knowing everything about every subject from politics to literature to the most intimate details of the non-success of her love affair on the previous night, always with the same detachment. When I told Christopher my reaction to her, he said: "No. When she talks like that she just wants someone to throw a cushion at her head," and before long not only was he throwing cushions at her head but she was at the center of his universe living at Fräulein Thurau's. Her absurdities had ceased to be pretentious and had become really absurd.

A considerable part of Christopher's conversation was—at that time—taken up with fantasies of what he would do with the world if he were dictator: the clothes he would make women wear, how he would change the climate of the British Isles, the politicians and political leaders whom he would have put in the Zoo, and so on. This fantasy corresponded to the fantasies of a surrealist revolution to be found in Auden's *The Orators*. At one time, when Christopher and I were having a holiday at Sellin, I myself thought seriously of writing a novel about one of those emperors or princes who are called to become dicator late in life, long after they have given up all thought of power. If I had not been so ignorant of all experience of history, and also of life, I would probably have done so.

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Dictator fantasies were in the air, nor were they entirely innocent. *The Orators* is one of Auden's most vital, but also his most cynical, gangish and brutal work. I myself, although I always hated fascism, was on the road of a development which led to the acceptance of methods which I knew to be wrong. Christopher's dictator fantasies, combined with his passionate admiration for his friends, produced a gang spirit. In fact he talked often of The Gang, and phrases such as The Chosen Few, The Lords of the Earth, the Happy Few, occured often in his half-fantastic conversation where the characters drawn after his friends lived in a world half-real, half-myth. Apart from the work of a few people he had never met, Christopher admitted that he was only interested in the work of his friends, and only concerned with their judgments. He undoubtedly had at this period a sense of his own power. And this produced in my mind a certain uneasiness, because any preoccupation with power in a friend raised the question: "Is he more interested in power or in friendship?" To ask this question about Christopher was particularly disconcerting. For his interest in people was real and developed with the insight of genius. Moreover his loyalty to his friends was genuine and capable of dramatic proof. I have no doubt that if one was in disgrace or need, Christopher's friendship could rise to heights of disinterestedness.

But against this, flattery played a distressing and somewhat ambiguous role in Christopher's friendships. His flattery had the initial charm of double bluff: but as I shall show, it was really a kind of treble bluff. He would make you think you were if not the most interesting and remarkable person he knew, at least among "the elect." He laid on the flattery with a trowel and with a smile. When he called attention to one's "inimitable" qualities, these very qualities had sometimes the charm of being one's weaknesses, and here he overplayed the flattery, so that one shared with him the joke of knowing that one was being flattered, the weakness of admitting that one was pleased by it, and the vice of secretly reflecting: "After all, I am wonderful. It is true." This was the double bluff, reinforced by Christopher himself admitting, speaking of what he required for his own work: "No praise can ever be enough. Praise must be absolutely undiluted." But the triple bluff arose when he confided in one: "Of course, I can always get on with any one I

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like. It's perfectly simple. I flatter 'em." And when he said "flatter 'em" one suddenly recollected that Christopher was the son of an army officer, from the huntin', ridin' and fishin' counties, an English country gentleman, with a certain military command of his environment. This final confidence of the triple bluff was the supreme flattery. It surely implied: "I wouldn't be telling you this if I didn't mean that when I flatter you it is no flattery at all, but quite serious." Or did it mean this? Is it possible that there was a faint malicious gleam in Christopher's eye when he said this, which meant: "I flatter you like everyone else, I know you love it, and I am prepared to tell you so to your face."? Or perhaps merely he was like a doctor who, with a smiling face, presses with a finger the revealed area of one's greatest weakness.

Yet I do not doubt that Christopher's affections were real. The proof after all of the reality of one's feelings is one's capacity to suffer for them. And Christopher suffered as intensely as anyone I have known. Extreme suffering caused by another person in his mind could be mixed with a quite farcical indifference. For example, once we were joined at Sellin by the boy who is called Otto in the story called "The Dead" (in *Goodbye to Berlin*) which is the most brilliant of Christopher's stories. Otto was vain, stupid, selfish, inconsiderate and weak: but withal, when he was with Christopher one saw real qualities of pathos, a rather folklorish kind of imagination, and perhaps a faintly discernible streak of affection in his nature. Christopher's company acted on him like a very powerful microscope through which Otto's good qualities were magnified ten-thousand times. Christopher in a way was aware of this. The whole of Sellin became a stage for Otto to act out a morality play. The beach was the stage for innocent daylight scenes of play and frank confession. At night, there was Hell in the shape of a dance hall situated near the woods (the lower circles of Hell), a little outside Sellin itself. Occasionally repulsive looking temptresses from the lower regions used to emerge during the day and sit close to us on the beach, sirens calling and beckoning at Otto. Christopher was the emaciated call to a better life, struggling with Otto's soul. Half of Christopher acted this out as pure farce. One day when Otto swam completely out of sight (he was a very powerful swimmer) Christopher said: "Stephen, pray. Pray on your knees that he may be drowned." On another oc-

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casion, when at the *Pension* where we were staying, Otto was on the verandah, carrying on a very intensive battle with a hornet, Christopher watched the scene through a window, murmuring: "Is it true that a hornet's sting can kill? Oh God, sting him, sting him!"

And yet there was a side of all this which made Christopher suffer enormously, to a degree which ravaged him. Sometimes I think that the strongest proof of moral imagination is a person's capacity to suffer for another person who may seem—to all outside observers—quite worthless. For is it not in the lives of the weak and the abject that we see the struggle of those who are tempted and lost which we have read of in all the stories which held our minds when we were young?

(*To be continued in the next issue*)

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Eleanor Clark

THE HEART OF THE AFTERNOON

On a blazing run-down street in Washington D.C. a boy of nine or ten is leaning patiently against the stoop of a dirty brick house. For the moment the traffic is stilled, but on the juke-box in the place next door the same record has been playing over and over for an hour, leading around interminably to the same high howled note at the end that the singer holds so long, it has become the natural sound of the landscape, as in some other place the tickling of water on the shore of a lake.

At the boy's feet, in the tiny iron-railed yard beside the stoop, is lying a headless doll that a few minutes ago fell for the twentieth time that day from one of the third-storey windows above, and after a while he will have to take it back into the house. But just now he only moves to sop up the sweat that forms under his belt and behind his ears, and now and then closes his eyes to squeeze out the heat. On the hedge in front of the house on the other side is a dead starling with angry open eyes that he and his sister propped up there in the morning, but all he is looking at now is the sun-spots over the street, and when there is an accident down at the corner he only turns his eyes.

It is the very heart of the afternoon, the point when the day goes dead and nothing matters and it seems that nothing will ever change. It struck him all of a sudden just after the doll fell the last time, when in a lull on the juke-box he heard a rooster crow somewhere down the street, and since then everything has been the same to him. He doesn't bother about what he is supposed to be doing, nor about what has happened down at the crossing of the avenues where a minute before there was only an empty expanse of concrete bright as a lake.

A man on a motorcycle with an empty sidecar was trying to turn too quickly and has spilled over on his head. The machine

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twitches and shakes upside down on top of him and finally falls back, leaving his blood uncovered in the sun, while a buzz of people appear out of the emptiness and swarm around the spot. They are dressed in light colors but look black, and when they go away the man and the machine are gone too and it is as if they had eaten him.

The whine of a police car rises and fades away, and then for a little while there is only the distant dry ticking of typewriters in the government building at the corner.

The boy passes the sole of his shoe slowly over the doll's body, and at last picks it up and starts slowly up the stairs. The head came off a long time ago from so much falling to the ground every day, and of the doll's clothing all that is left is a bit of torn chemise, but his grandmother could not live without it, and if she is made to wait too long after she has thrown it out the window the blood comes to her face and she begins to rap angrily at the window-sill.

This time, however, she has been distracted by the family's gathering around her chair at the window.

"Dead as a doornail I tell you. You look in the paper tomorrow if he wasn't."

"Dead. You want everybody to be dead. Maybe he passed out a minute."

"I saw him move," the boy's sister says, lying as always when she is excited. "I saw him open his eyes."

"All right, all right, here it is," the mother says. She takes the doll and shoves it with a little sigh into the grandmother's hands, which close on it hard. "You ought to brought it up quicker."

"I did bring it up."

"I said quicker. You ought to brought it up quicker. We've got enough trouble already without you chasing after everything in the street."

"Leave the kid alone," his father says. "It's only natural."

"It ain't a fit sight for a child."

His father is a night-watchman, and this is his early morning. In the dark cubicle beyond the kitchen they can see the bent iron bed he has just left, the sheets pulled half to the floor and the flies lighting here and there to sip at the creases in it. He goes over to the sink to shave, the naked upper half of his body smeared with the sweat of his daytime sleep.

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"She'd be better off in a home," he says as he always says at this hour, and nobody ever answers.

At the window the old woman busily twists and twists the body of the doll. Sometimes she makes a show of hiding it in a fold of her cotton skirt and waits for someone to notice, and sometimes she lets it fall and plays with her own gnarled fingers a while, but she always comes back to it, and always after a time will throw it out the window.

She looks like the father and like the boy. They all have the same long narrow nose quirked up at the end, the eyes too close together and the big cheek-bones wide, only from her jaw-bone the skin drapes away, colorless and used up like the kitchen towels.

She weaves her secret fabrics from the shreds of stuffing at the doll's neck, while like a tin roof in the sun the high note from the juke-box next door establishes itself as a thing outside of time, impervious and interminable, and the heat crawls on centipede feet through the hairs on all their bodies.

The father brings the razor once down his cheek and when he shakes the razor the lather drops in the sink like a cow patty.

"Anyway there're too many nigger drivers in this town."

"He wasn't a nigger."

"I never said he was. I said there're too many nigger drivers driving taxis in this town. You can't hardly trust yourself in the street."

"Driving along one minute and dead the next."

"He's no more dead than you are."

"You can still see it," the sister says from the window, this time with awe. "You can still see the wet place, right where it was before."

"Cluck cluck cluck," goes the old woman, rattling her teeth.

It seems that no day has ever been different from this one, and there will never be any other time of the day. The boy might just as well be his father or his grandmother or the doll without a head; there is no difference between them.

The mother tells him to take the baby down to the yard, and after they have been there a while the doll falls again with a little soft padding sound in the dust near his feet.

Nothing matters, there is nothing he wants to do. All the noises he hears seem to come through some thick moist substance like the fat of the women's arms at the windows, so that there is no difference

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between them, and the dead bird on the hedge is only a dead bird. He wanders over and sticks his finger a second in its open beak, because its eyes are still watching him, but nothing happens. He might as well have put his finger in his own mouth.

He comes back and picks up the doll and takes it into the house. The sun is still beating down as it was before, as if it were stuck in one place in the sky and were never going to move again, and the only thing that makes any sense in the world is this relation he has with his grandmother, which will go on forever.

But as the night is starting he walks with his father to work and doesn't go home right away, and then he sees something that fills him with joy.

It is a man cutting a piece of fruit, and it occurs by the shaky light of a hanging lantern, down on the river-front. The man, who is swarthy and powerful and carries a long knife like a machete, is selling off a cargo of watermelons on the deck of his boat. The boy watches from the wharf while a customer goes down, and a moment later in the flickering darkness sees the man lift his knife and in three quick stabs carve a long wedge sharp as a pencil at the end, which he holds up a few seconds and then silently slips back into place.

It has only taken a minute, and in that light it leaves no trace, nobody could know from looking at the melon that anything had happened. But the boy has seen the blood-red triangle of its flesh, and when the man happens to glance up and catches the elation in his eyes, for just the barest second the intimation of a smile passes between them, as if they had been accomplices in a perfect crime.

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FILM CHRONICLE

DAY OF WRATH: THE ENCLOSED IMAGE

Carl Dreyer's basic problem as an artist is one that seems almost inevitably to confront the self-conscious creator of "art" films: the conflict between a love for the purely visual and the tendencies of a medium that is not only visual but also dramatic. The principle that the film is a medium based on movement has often been used to justify a complete preoccupation with visual patterns, as if the ideal film would be one that succeeded in divorcing movement from content, but it is this principle itself that raises the problem, for the presentation of human beings in movement necessarily leads to the creation of drama; thus the maker of "art" films, unless he limits himself to complete abstraction or to generalized poetic symbolism, tends to raise aesthetic demands that he cannot satisfy within the framework he has set. Only in the earlier parts of *Day of Wrath* can Dreyer be said to have solved this problem. And the solution, though brilliant, is essentially unstable; the weaknesses of the film's later parts grow out of the virtues of its beginning.

The film opens with the playing of *Dies Irae*, a dreadful, insistent hymn prolonged to the point where it comes to seem a kind of outrage; it is music that does not aim at the listener's pleasure or require his consent. In effect, this music establishes the existence of a world whose graces pretend to no connection with the needs of human beings, a world that may find it proper in the realization of its designs to burn a woman alive for being a witch.

There is only the most unemphatic indication that such a world is supposed to have existed in Denmark early in the seventeenth century. It is not a historical world—though it exemplifies certain historical ideas—and the primary tendency of Dreyer's direction is to keep it from becoming historical, to preserve it self-enclosed and static. Everything leading up to the execution of the witch Marthe is presented like a pageant: each movement is graceful and dignified, each figure in some particular fashion beautiful, each shot "composed"; and the camera focuses always on the leading figures of the pageant itself, following their

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slow and predetermined movement with an entranced solemnity that permits no glance at the actuality which has brought them into being. Not a single shot is spent on documentation, and though the whole "issue" is between good and evil, these concepts, too, exist only as parts of the spectacle: "evil" is the figure of an old woman whose function is to be thrown upon a fire after completing certain movements of flight, suffering, struggle, and despair; "good" is the process by which this ceremony is carried out.

No dramatic conflict surrounds the witch herself—her one mistaken effort to bargain for life remains no more than an expected stage in her destruction—and there is only the barest beginning of the drama that is to take place after her death. Her very sufferings are given an explicit quality of formality: three screams mark the three decisive moments—capture, confession, death; when she lies bound to the ladder and impotently shaking her fist, one's attention is drawn to a pattern of leaf-shadows that moves across her face. And all problematical aspects of the subject—questions of justice and authority, the reality of witchcraft, the existence of God and the Devil—are avoided or postponed: it is shown, for example, that the pastor Absalon, who is the leading figure in the witch's condemnation, is himself in an ambiguous situation, but this is not permitted to become a dramatic problem until after her death; and the activities that constitute the witch's crime, though formally indicated, remain vague—only later on is it shown that she might have been regarded as actually dangerous.

Yet this formalized and narrow spectacle creates a degree of excitement beyond anything one experiences during the later, more dramatic portions of the film; by the time the witch falls screaming upon the fire, the tension has come close to a point at which it might be reasonable to leave the theater. The chief source of this tension seems to be in the interplay between Dreyer's general approach to art and certain of the specific tendencies of his medium.

Dreyer's initial impulse, in his deliberate exclusion of the historical and dramatic, is to deprive events of the quality of reality; it is this, indeed, which accounts for his concern with the past: since the past can be contemplated but not changed, it exists from one point of view as an aesthetic object ready-made—one can experience it "pure." But he practices his aestheticism on events that possess *a priori* an unusual emotional importance, and in one of the most realistic of all mediums. In the screen's absolute clarity, where all objects are brought close and defined unambiguously, the "reality" of an event can be made to inhere simply in its visible presence; so long as the internal structure of

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a film remains consistent, all its elements are in these terms equally "real"—that is, completely visible. Thus at his best—which means, in this film, when he is creating his own images and not imitating the creations of seventeenth-century painting—Dreyer is able to give his aestheticized vision of the past all the force of reality without impairing its aesthetic autonomy; in the absence of a historical-dramatic reality, the purely visible dominates and is sufficient: the witch is an object of art, but she is also—and just as fully—a human being (she is *there*), and she is burnt; the burning is so to speak accomplished by the camera, which can see the witch without having to "interpret" her.

The effect is something like a direct experience of the tension between art and life. In a sense, the image *as* image becomes a dramatic force: the issue is not, after all, good against evil or God against Satan, but flesh against form; stripped as it is of all historical or social reference, the spectacle is of a woman burnt to serve beauty. It is a spectacle not to be understood—the image itself is all the meaning—but to be endured; and the enormous excitement that surrounds it, the sense almost of a prolonged assault on one's feelings, results largely from the exclusion of all that might be used to create an appearance of understanding. Even to see the witch as a victim of injustice would provide a certain relief by placing the events on the screen within some "normal" frame of response. But no such opportunity appears, nothing *in* the film is allowed to speak for the audience or to the audience (two of the characters cannot bear to watch the burning, but this is not what is wanted: it is merely a sign of their weakness). It is as if the director, in his refusal to acknowledge that physical movement implies dramatic movement, were denying the relevance of the spectator's feelings; one is left with no secure means of connecting the witch with reality, and yet she is real in herself and must be responded to; as responses are blocked, the tension increases.

In this blocking of responses, it is again important that Dreyer's aestheticism leads him to the past. The historical past, being real, embodies a multitude of possibilities; the aesthetic past is created by eliminating all possibilities but one, and that is the accomplished one. Thus time becomes fate: the image is distant and untouchable because its form was fixed long before we come to see it; the witch *will* be burnt because witches *were* burnt. The feelings of the spectator really are in a way irrelevant: he is watching what has ceased to exist, and there is no one to "care" what he feels. He has his feelings nevertheless.

In the later parts of the film, in order to relieve the tension that has been established, it became necessary to permit a reassertion of those

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historical-dramatic elements which have been so rigidly suppressed. But the basic style of the film is already fixed, and this need to introduce new elements results in incongruities, passages of boredom, and dramatic incoherence.

The dramatic plot which begins to work itself out after the witch's death concerns the adultery of the pastor's young wife Anne and his son Martin; Anne becomes a witch, ensnaring her lover and later killing her husband by the power of evil. The ambiguity of the pastor's position, too, is involved with witchcraft: his sin was to conceal the fact that Anne's mother was a witch. Thus witchcraft is no longer pure image, it is a way of behaving, and the question of its reality is no longer to be avoided. A psychological answer is impossible: Dreyer is already committed to keeping the past *in* the past. But the supernatural answer, which is the one he chooses (and with a hesitation that only makes matters worse), is just as bad: once the question of witchcraft is raised, no one can be expected to believe in its reality.

The attempt to impose belief by purely aesthetic means is inevitably a failure, both dramatically and visually. There is a scene in which the pastor walks home at night through an "evil" storm that is the height of visual banality; then his wife, at home with her lover, is shown saying, "If he were dead—"; then back to the pastor, who suddenly straightens up in the howling wind and says to his companion, "I felt as if Death had brushed me by." And there is a continual effort to use the camera for symbolic comment that eventually becomes clear enough but is never convincing: when Anne first tries her "power" in order to call Martin to her side, Dreyer repeats on her face the shifting pattern of leaves that appeared on the face of the old witch before she was burnt; when the lovers walk in the fields, the camera keeps turning upward to the trees above their heads. In general, there is an attempt to equate the outdoors, the world of nature, with evil (the pastor's mother, who is the one firm moral pillar, is never seen outside the rigidly ordered household she controls); but the camera cannot create a religious system.

The purely dramatic failure is most obvious in the film's conclusion, when Martin turns against Anne and thus leads her to confess her witchcraft. Martin's defection is not made to seem an adequate reason for Anne's confession, and Martin's action itself is entirely without motivation: the very skill with which the director now tries to transmute visual patterns into drama (as earlier he had tried to make dramatic patterns purely visual) becomes a kind of irrelevancy. But even in this later section of the film there is still much that is successful. When Anne resolves to kill her husband, a virtual transformation of character

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is accomplished by the manipulation of lighting. And whenever the aesthetic image does not come into direct conflict with the dramatic structure, it can still take on some of the purity and completeness of the earlier scenes—for example, in the procession of choir boys at the pastor's funeral—except that now the image is felt as an interruption of the action.

At bottom, the film is an aesthetic paradox: out of the pure and enclosed image Dreyer creates a sort of "pure drama," in which the point of conflict is precisely the exclusion of drama; but this in turn creates a tension that the image alone cannot resolve; the dramatic nature of the medium must reassert itself in the later portions of the film, and Dreyer is involved again in the initial contradiction.

Robert Warshow

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BOOKS

FRENCH WITH TEARS—AND LAUGHTER

THE CLASSICAL MOMENT. Studies of Corneille, Moliere, and Racine. By Martin Turnell. New Directions. $4.50.

There are one or two very good reasons for singling out this book for review, and consequently one or two, perhaps more, ways to approach it.

One way is suggested by the sight of a fat book now in reach of my hand on the shelf: an anthology of English literature, compiled for the use of college students by six professors at the most prominent universities in America (the names do not matter). It is a good anthology, providing very many pages of well-selected text as well as copious and detailed information by the editors. But what catches my attention at the moment is something else: a long introduction, intended to spur the student on to diligent scholarship by extolling the glories of English literature, comparing it with all the other literatures of the world, and concluding by awarding it the palm as the greatest of all.

To dispute this conclusion is not my aim; probably it is right, though I am not sure that the argument itself is a very profitable one or that the grounds on which in this case it is argued are very relevant or very profound; but what I am quite sure of is that the presentation of other literatures by the professorial editors is very much less than adequate, does not show a very intimate understanding of those literatures—and, conversely, an understanding of the ways in which English literature itself is deficient, the themes it has not touched, the depths not sounded, limited as it is by the peculiar national experience of the English people. Now, if this particular anthology represents, as I think it does, the highest level of ordinary academic culture in America, then certain questions may be put and certain conclusions must be drawn about the kind of influences which we Americans absorb, consciously or otherwise, during our youthful exposures to literature. Most of us take our first courses in literature in an "English Department" (the rubric itself is very significant), and during college days "literature"

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and "English" are synonymous words. (This departmentalization may be breaking down in some few universities, but nearly all the people now teaching were trained under the older system.) This is something for Americans to think about—and in relation to a question much more general than that of the academic organization in our colleges. Obviously we are bound to English literature more closely than any other for the simple reason that we are bound to the English language; but we can distinguish between the English language or literature and the English mind or character, recognizing that this literature does have certain horizons set by the national experience of the English themselves. What we find so often in professors of literature in our universities is not merely that they are experts in the literature of England, but that they seek to be more English than the English, as if trying to take out some special and curious kind of English citizenship. They would hardly recognize that it is perfectly possible for an American—because he is American and not English—to find himself, from the accidents of his own temperament and experience, more definitely oriented to the themes and style of another literature—French, for example. Multiply these cases, and this personal orientation becomes something that can be generalized for the cultural situation of America as a whole (if this last expression has any meaning beyond what goes on in the heads of a few thousand disturbed persons); it becomes one of the complexities, but also one of the opportunities of our situation as Americans.

All this may seem a rather lengthy preparation for discussing Mr. Turnell's book, but it is just the characteristic of a good book like this that it provokes one to this kind of generalized comment. This is one of the best examples of recent British criticism that I have seen; Mr. Turnell carries his learning lightly, writes with such an engaging directness, liveliness, and simplicity that his book can be taken as a rather remarkable contrast to some of the cramped, self-involved, and limpingly pedantic products of American criticism. There is something especially rewarding in an Englishman's approaching French literature when the Englishman has that particular virtue of his nation, the beautiful English candor. Probably no American could be a francophile with the naturalness of Mr. Turnell, for the American will find himself inevitably getting too exhibitionistic, self-conscious, or precious. Being English, having this English candor, Mr. Turnell sounds all the more convincing when he conveys those virtues of French literature that English lacks. His discussion of love, in connection with Racine's *Phèdre*, can only be described as charming, for he understands that this is the one subject on which, in comparison with the French, English literature is almost adolescent.

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(The French, Stendhal remarked, are incapable of real love because they live too much by vanity and ego; Mr. Turnell remarks that the French have produced the greatest literature on the subject of love. These two remarks may express opposite sides of the same truth, for the glory of French literature here is precisely in recording the impact of the sentiments of love upon the ego—something we do not find in the literature of the Italians, who, according to Stendhal, are much more adapted to the experience of love.)

These studies of Molière and Racine are written, then, with an eye not only to the continuing tradition of French life and thought, but also to the continuity of these classical writers with later novelists like Constant, Stendhal, and Proust. The cultivation of the past for present uses is the critic's chief business; years ago when Eliot plunged into the study of the Elizabethans, he was really aiming at a dream of the rebirth of poetic drama (a possibility that has not yet materialized) or anyway at the use of Elizabethan sensibility in his own poetry. Racine and Molière can hardly be recommended fruitfully to study by our modern dramatists, for the contemporary theater is not in a condition to absorb these influences; but the recommendation might be made profitably to some of our younger American novelists. With its dependence upon texture, atmosphere, furniture, the novel in some quarters now threatens to dissolve into sheer décor (much as I admire Jean Stafford, I sometimes wonder what she would do without her afghan rugs, challis guimpes, raffia baskets, etc., etc.), and against this general tendency it might be a useful exercise in discipline for somebody to try to write a novel with the bareness of a Racine play.

Imagine a harried reader struggling through the dense atmosphere of one of these novels of sensibility where every page is as intricately embroidered as a piece of Venetian point: as he pushes his way down a new page, stumbling on the faded Axminster carpet he bumps against the sham buhl table, crashes against the Sheraton sideboard, and wheeling to get out of the way of the furniture fetches up with a crack of his head against an ormolu clock on the imitation-marble mantelshelf; at which point, rubbing his bruises, he may very well let out a bellow of impatient rage: "Get this god-damned furniture out of the novel!"

Well, I exaggerate; and of course it would be silly to argue one exclusion of taste for another; but exaggeration has been the usual weapon in the history of criticism for calling people's attention to one kind of taste, and the taste for the kind of literature I am talking about is one that I find generally lacking, and lacking even in certain people whose literary sensitivity I otherwise admire very much.

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Some witty scientist (Laplace, I think it was) remarked about a performance of Racine's *Phèdre*, *"Qu'est-ce que cela prouve?"*—What does that prove?—and everybody seems to have taken for granted what at least this famous remark is supposed to prove. Assuming what is known and obvious about this question, we may wonder whether it would not have occurred to Racine to think that *Phèdre* did "prove" something, since he wrote with the conception widespread in the seventeenth century that a work of art was intended, as Horace said, *"ut doceat, ut placeat."* Proof and disproof are not the right words; the point is that in Racine the effort is to state a very complex emotion in the simplest possible way, and in this sense to distill a "lesson" from experience. The extreme case in this direction would be moralists like La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère, who struggle to bring their complex experience to expression in some simple and general formula or aphorism. Now, the distance between La Rochefoucauld and Racine; between La Rochefoucauld and Constant, Stendhal, or Gide is not the same as the distance between La Rochefoucauld and—well, choose your own example from our contemporary novelists of atmosphere and sensibility. (Proust might appear to be a different case, since he pursues complication within complication, but, as Cocteau has said, at every step in the complication Proust will be found hitting the bull's eye directly and simply; and because he is always attempting to distill the lesson from his experience, he belongs in this line of writers.) The contemporary American fiction that depends chiefly on atmosphere and texture moves in just the opposite direction: the trick is to take some very simple and banal emotion or idea and surround it with the greatest possible complications of décor and furniture—the best stories in *The New Yorker* would be the most convenient illustration. And—just to throw a last stone at Laplace and his wisecrack—remember that Nietzsche spoke of *learning* from Stendhal (and Dostoevsky), and there is no reason to doubt that when he said this he really meant "learn."

If I seem to have been using the occasion of a review as a springboard for a little lay sermon, it is because I know no recent book which brings out so well this peculiarly French literary tradition, and my reason for reviewing the book in the first place is to recommend it, not to specialized students of Molière and Racine, but to those readers who might want to have a sense of this tradition, and of the resources it might still have for contemporary use if there were any writers around who wanted to avail themselves of it. Mr. Turnell is at his best in the long remarkable chapter on Racine (whom he treats, and correctly, as

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a very "modern" poet), but I should also like to single out his section on Molière's *Misanthrope*. This latter is one of the best discussions in the book, and yet somehow leaves me feeling that it is incomplete and unsatisfying, as perhaps any discussion of this complicated and puzzling play must be.

Mr. Turnell takes the play as a comedy, not as the tragedy which the Romantics, following Rousseau, made of it. But somehow it is a "serious" comedy, and the problem of its seriousness is not satisfactorily disposed of by saying, as Mr. Turnell does, that comedy, too, is a serious art. The seriousness of the play is puzzling because we feel that Molière got his hands on a material that he could not quite press into the framework of his kind of comedy. (The hatred of human life in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* somehow comes off better, perhaps simply because it is dumped there and left at that, and because this kind of Shakespearian comedy does not press toward the formal resolution of Molière's comedy.) Probably the personal factor in the writer cannot be overlooked at this point, though I don't know that there is enough known about Molière's personal life to provide safe clues. But Mr. Turnell does supply one footnote that has fascinating implications:

"When the play was originally produced, Alceste (the misanthrope) was played by Molière, Célimène by his wife, Eliante by his mistress, and Arsinoé by Mlle. du Parc who had repulsed his advances!"

The situation teases our imagination: Molière playing the part of a man who suffers from the discreet treacheries of human relations on the same stage with three other human beings with whom he must have had full opportunity to experience the treacherous mobility of the human heart! A man who had lived through these violent complications in his own life, we feel, must have been aware of those deeper resonances behind Alceste's fulminations. Of course, Molière was first of all the practical professional playwright, his business was comedy, and so for stage purposes he uses Alceste for trivial buffooneries where his misanthropy does become ridiculous; but Alceste never becomes an essentially ridiculous figure, and so long as he does not, there remains a core to his misanthropy which is not resolved in the play; hence its puzzling ambiguity.

We have, of course, to distinguish between the emotions with which we now read the *Misanthrope* and the emotions it embodied for Molière and Molière's audience. There seems to be a misconception obscurely working in some of our practicing critics that a work of the past, if read correctly, must be read with the emotions of its contemporary audience; and you can pin this down in Eliot in his idea that the emotions pro-

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duced by a literary work are something fixed and unchanging, taking their permanent place in an hierarchical order. Needless to say, the critic must not confuse our later emotions with those of the contemporary audience, and one job of criticism is to disengage these latter by accurate scholarship, a controlled imagination, and a considerable bit of common sense. But the point that needs emphasis now—especially when certain critics have insinuated that the experience itself is suspect—is that the different emotions with which a later age may read an earlier work is a perfectly legitimate experience of literature, is what makes literature an enduring thing, and that the great work, as Philip Rahv has said, is precisely one that is capable of reproducing itself anew in later periods. Molière's *Misanthrope* is a powerful example of the work that has this capacity to be born anew, and perhaps inevitably the modern experience is that we read it with tears rather than laughter. Other expressions of the horror in the world—from Swift to Dostoevsky and beyond—have interposed themselves between us and Molière, so that for us the misanthropic vision cannot be dissolved so easily by Molière's voice of common sense, the character Philinte. Even if the misanthrope himself be ridiculous, the misanthropic vision may be true. A torn being, the misanthrope is divided by a fatal ambiguity: he is right in his vision, he is wrong only because he too is human. This division does not necessarily mean that he lives a lie; misanthropy may be an authentic existence, though to live it out completely the misanthrope must devour and destroy himself, as in the case of Swift. No doubt this is not, cannot be, the highest form of human wisdom; but the wisdom, whatever it be, that would rise above and dissolve the misanthropic vision hardly seems to be expressed by the worldly and well-balanced voice of Philinte; and there are many things in the play which make us feel that Molière felt this too.

William Barrett

THE HUMAN AND THE MODERN

THE DEHUMANIZATION OF ART AND NOTES ON THE NOVEL. By José Ortega y Gasset. Princeton University Press. $2.00.

Of these two essays on art by José Ortega y Gasset, the first, dealing with "The Dehumanization of Art," is the more ambitious and important. The radical break in continuity between modern art and that of the nineteenth century is sharper than any similar change since the Renaissance superseded the Gothic; and Ortega's essay is one of the earliest attempts to work out the full implications of this historic

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stylistic revolution. First published in Spanish in 1925, the essay has had a considerable influence on the younger generation of writers and artists in Spain and South America, who looked on it as a defense of their efforts by one of Spain's leading men of letters. Fragments were translated, if my memory is correct, in *The Symposium* during the Thirties, and are now included in Melvin Rader's anthology of modern aestheticians; but this is the first time that the entire work has been available in English. Like all of Ortega's writings, the essay has the merit of defining a crucial cultural problem with admirable precision, and of opening up a variety of illuminating perspectives from which it may be viewed. In this case the interpretative framework within which Ortega sets the problem of modern art, however, is determined by his more general philosophical position; and this, in my opinion, leads to a basic distortion in his analysis of the meaning of modern art.

The new style, according to Ortega, has seven main aspects, but we need only concern ourselves with two since the others are merely their offshoots. These two central aspects are: a tendency "to dehumanize art," and to regard art as "something without any transcendence."* In coining the word "dehumanization" to express the quality of modern art, Ortega has undoubtedly brought into relief one of its predominant traits. The application of this term, of course, is most obvious in the plastic arts, where it would cover not only abstract art as such, but all modern art in which the importance of recognizable human forms is no longer dependent on their expressiveness as specifically human. Even where such forms appear as part of a composition, they are treated solely as aesthetic objects that may be distorted at the artist's will to meet the artistic necessities of his work. Similarly, in the poetry stemming from the tradition of Mallarmé, Ortega finds the emphasis placed on the creation of "lyrical objects distinct from the human flora and fauna . . . figures so extramundane that merely looking at them is delight." While there is a more complex problem here than in the plastic arts, it cannot be denied that the greatest modern poets tend toward the creation of self-enclosed poetic universes, and that their poetry, to be understood, must be referred to these autonomous structures rather than directly to ordinary human experience.

No doubt it is this autonomy, this lack of any immediate relationship

* I have been forced to amend the English version of this phrase given by the translator, which in the original reads "una cosa sin transcendencia alguna." It is translated as "a thing of no transcending consequence." The concept of transcendence, however, is a key one in Ortega's thought, and he uses it in an exact philosophical sense. The translator's version dilutes it to a platitude.

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to spontaneous experience, which encouraged Ortega to affirm that modern art has no transcendence. What he means by transcendence, as he explains, is a "connection with dramatic social or political movements, or with profound religious and philosophical currents." For Ortega, then, dehumanized modern art cannot—or, to be more exact, does not wish to —transcend the boundaries of its aesthetic universe so as to make contact with these other areas of human experience; it prefers to remain within its own sphere—limited, it is true, but free from complexity and pretension. "The new style asks to be linked to the triumph of sport and games," Ortega writes, rather than, as in the nineteenth century, to "nothing less than the salvation of mankind."

In reading these ideas, one cannot help remembering that Ortega conceived them during the heyday of Dadaism in France and Ultraism in Spain, and at a time when Henry de Montherlant, in a series of influential novels, was glorifying the prowess of the athlete as the true symbol of the modern spirit. These temporary phenomena undoubtedly left their traces on Ortega's notion of how modern art expressed the *Zeitgeist;* but far more important is Ortega's conception of the change in the whole character of modern life, as expounded in his most systematic work, *El Tema de Nuestro Tiempo* (translated into English as *The Modern Theme*). This group of lectures, given in 1922, is a Nietzschean attack on "culture" as a complex of abstract values which, like Christianity, places the ends of human existence in a sphere transcendent to life itself; "culturalism is a Christianity without God." The twentieth century, Ortega believes, will sweep away these transcendent values, replacing them with values that arise spontaneously in the course of biological existence and are immanent to life rather than transcendent. As a result, modern life will have what Ortega calls "a sportive and festive sense"; and this is specifically linked, in *El Tema de Nuestro Tiempo,* with the attitude of the modern artist—an attitude that the older generation finds it impossible to understand. For them, art was a profoundly serious affair with an almost religious mission; now, like life itself, art is a delightful game with no transcendent meanings. Ortega's view that dehumanized modern art has no transcendence, therefore, is not primarily derived from a disinterested study of the history of art, but is, instead, a direct outgrowth of his interpretation of modern culture.

Now, the dehumanization of art is by no means a new occurrence in the history of art styles: primitive art is dehumanized when compared with the post-Renaissance tradition of Western Europe, and so is Byzantine and Gothic art, to say nothing of the Far East. It is astonishing that Ortega should have completely neglected to attain any historical pers-

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pective on his problem, and to inquire whether, in the past, a dehumanized art was in fact accompanied by the lack of transcendence, the divorce from any profound strata of extra-aesthetic values, that Ortega attributes to modern art. Those art historians who have studied this matter most intensively, like Wilhelm Worringer, have come to conclusions exactly opposite from Ortega. Far from denoting a lack of transcendence, Worringer tells us in his famous book, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung,* dehumanization in art appears in cultures with a deep sense of the supernatural and the extra-terrestrial. The dehumanized art-world of these cultures bodies forth the stability, the order, the harmony of the transcendent values to which they aspire; dehumanization and transcendence, contrary to Ortega, have historically always gone hand in hand so far as art is concerned. It is in periods of so-called realism, of immersion in the human world of common-sense experience, that art lacks transcendence in the broader meaning of this word; for the values on which this art is based are those immanent to biological existence. In the light of history, then, it would seem far more plausible that instead of indicating a lack of transcendence, the dehumanization of modern art is an advance symptom of the spiritual dislocation of modern man, searching for a new transcendent source of values now that the religion of progress—a truly immanent religion!—has begun to reveal its emptiness. Certainly, the revival of interest in recent years in theology and metaphysics, as well as the influence of such writers as Kafka and Kierkegaard—not to mention the later T. S. Eliot—would appear to bear out this latter view. Ortega's hypothesis, in any event, is at variance with the known historical facts, and is supported by nothing except the symmetry it enables him to construct between his overall analysis of modern culture and the meaning of modern art. That Ortega's essay is still a landmark in the discussion of modern art, despite its weakness on this key issue, is ample evidence of the abundant insight it contains. Especially striking are those sections where Ortega explores the attitude of the modern artist before reality, and attempts to sketch a "scale of emotional distances between ourselves and reality" to illustrate this attitude.

His second essay, "Notes on the Novel," is an excellent example of how Ortega can take what is largely a commonplace and make it the occasion for some subtle and suggestive intellectual arabesques. Starting from his impression that a novelist like Stendhal, who uses a minimum of plot, seems to impart more lived reality to his characters than Balzac, with all his details and dénouements, Ortega swings into an account of the difference between French classical tragedy and Spanish tragedy of the Golden Age. Like Stendhal, French tragedy uses a minimum of plot

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and concentrates on the psychological interior of the personality; Spanish tragedy, on the other hand, exhibits a naive delight in action for its own sake similar to the delight of early novel readers in sheer narrative action. But this leads to the general question of action versus contemplation as forms of experience; and Ortega, shifting this opposition to the plane of the psychology of attention, demonstrates that while the sophisticated reader is no longer enthralled by action for its own sake, yet the elimination of all action from a novel, as in Proust, proves "that there has to be at least a dash of action to make contemplation possible." And so the essay proceeds, darting from one perspective to another, never dwelling in any one for very long, but always striking sparks that light up hidden corners before dying out. Ortega's conclusion is that "the interest in the outer mechanism of the plot is today reduced to a minimum," and that "the novel must now revolve about the superior interest emanating from the inner mechanism of the personages."

Having gone this far to make Ortega's writings on aesthetic matters available to English readers, it is unfortunate that the publishers did not go further and give us a really representative sampling of Ortega's voluminous work in this field. Such a sampling might include other lengthy essays on aesthetics, like "Adán en el paraíso" and "Sobre el punto de vista en las artes" (which contains a fascinating parallel between constructivist art and modern phenomenology), as well as Ortega's articles on Spanish and French writers and artists like Azorín, Baroja, Barrès, Velasquez, Zuloaga and others. Although known to English readers, if at all, mainly as a writer on social and political matters, Ortega is a first-rate practicing critic, who combines to an unusual degree a quicksilver sensibility with a capacity for incisive philosophical generalization; and it may well be that his writings on art will prove his least ephemeral productions. In addition, English readers should know that Ortega is one of the great prose masters of modern times, whose style, in the original, is remarkable for its nonchalant elegance and expository finesse. It was probably too much to hope that something of this might be retained in English, but the present version, nonetheless, seems unnecessarily awkward. Nor, since the translator unaccountably omits phrases and needlessly shuffles clauses, is this caused by what would be a commendable effort to stick closely to Ortega's Spanish syntax. From the evidence of the text, the truth seems to be, unfortunately, that the translator does not have the requisite command of English idiom to do as much justice to Ortega as might otherwise be possible.

Joseph Frank

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FICTION CHRONICLE

BENYA KRIK, THE GANGSTER AND OTHER STORIES. By Isaak Babel. Edited by Avrahm Yarmolinsky. Shocken. $1.50.
THE SKIN OF DREAMS. By Raymond Queneau. Translated by H. J. Kaplan. New Directions. $1.50.
PLAYING FOR KEEPS. By Roger Vailland. Translated by Gerard Hopkins. Houghton Mifflin. $3.00.
ALL HALLOW'S EVE. By Charles Williams. Introduction by T. S. Eliot. Pellegrini & Cudahy. $2.75.
STALINGRAD. By Theodor Plievier. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston. Appleton-Century-Crofts. $3.00.

One hears everywhere that the publishing business is in a bad way, not near bankruptcy, but surly and sour and toughened by the disappearance of the recent golden days in which anything would sell. Book lovers, literary agents, and writers are despondent. It is rumored that only good sellers will be allowed, but looking over my list of books one sees that the editors, like the betrayed wife, have been shielded from the scandal which the neighbors are talking about. The ardent old publishing schizophrenia is still active; irritable, impatient, and parsimonious as the giant may be, the wrinkles of folly, conscience, or pride, whatever lucky derangements keep unprofitable books on the stands have not been wiped out by the shock of reduced sales. Anyone would publish Mann or Gide on the one hand, or Taylor Caldwell on the other, but how are we to explain, if a literary civil war is really upon us, the appearance of a dim apparition like Charles Williams, not a classic nor even a figure, and furthermore not even alive, so that there can be no sweet editorial hope that he will hit the chips one day? Certainly none of these books, with the exception of the popular *Stalingrad,* will be widely advertised or sold, but that, if it is true a book has to sell well up into the thousands to break even, adds a lovely, murky background to the whole proceeding, deepens and darkens the final occupational secret which we are happy not to be able to penetrate.

Nearly all of the titles have some support: an introduction by T. S. Eliot, the dignity of a foreign literary prize—all except the best of them, Isaak Babel's thin volume of short stories, *Benya Krik, the Gangster,* which seems forlorn and isolated, an orphan hiding in the darkest corner of the library. Babel is a magical Russian writer, a pure and stunning talent ennobled by an indescribable sincerity of feeling. Most of these stories are extremely brief and the brilliant effects he achieves, often in less than five pages, are at least mentionable as a phenomenon. "Gedali, founder of a Utopian International, has

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gone to synagogue to pray," one of these fragments ends, and in that plain sentence captures some of the sadness and complexity of the early days of the Russian Revolution. The exploits of Benya Krik, a notorious Odessa gangster, are worthy of comparison with Gogol.

All of Babel's work ought to be available in this country. Shocken is to be congratulated for publishing him, but one regrets the decision to present him so meekly and meagerly by isolating the Jewish stories.

Queneau's novel, *The Skin of Dreams,* is episodic, gay, witty and scandalous, extremely literary, full of slang, puns, mock-scenarios, and outrageous characters. I suppose one might say it is the sort of thing Kenneth Patchen tries to do, but the results are all in Queneau's favor, since his work has just that quality semi-surrealist fiction must have—it is great fun to read. In the end its virtuosity and extraordinary maintenance of the picaresque tone stay in the mind more firmly than the characters and their adventures. The translation must have been perilous and H. J. Kaplan has done a superb job.

Playing for Keeps by Roger Vailland, a Resistance novel, is a familiar French article, stuffed high, like a prosperous housewife's marketbasket, with existential wine and meaty tidbits of sex, narcotics, and dialectics. (The number of dope injections in current French fiction makes our marijuana raids seem an inexplicably old-fashioned repression of an innocent pastime.) The Resistance hero, a man who can make up his mind, is here again: thirty-six years old, the survivor of Marxism, Mallarmé, André Breton, an atheist and realist, a reluctant fighter for the cause. "I come of a middle-class family. I am fighting as hard as I know against my class, but I have inherited its vices, and I love its luxury and its pleasures. Many things which the militant communist does not even suspect, play a large part in my life. . . ."

Vailland's novel appeared in France in 1945, the same year Sartre's *Age of Reason* and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Blood of Others* were published. There is an uncomfortable, ghostly repetition of character and accent in all of these novels and Vailland, reaching the American reader last, suffers accordingly the handicaps of his poor post position in the race.

All Hallow's Eve, the first of Charles Williams' novels to be published here, arrives with an introduction from T. S. Eliot and friendly notice by C. S. Lewis. We have the feeling that we are making, in Williams, the acquaintance of a respectable English eccentric, a peculiar and special man, not likely to cause a sensation, but solidly rooted in his own set which is, to all appearances, religious, at least in the loosest sense of the term. It is hopeless to try to reach a synopsis of the events

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in *All Hallow's Eve*: the best thing in it is Williams' brilliance in imagining how the dead feel. His heroines, Lester and Evelyn, are wandering about London after having been killed by an airplane.

It is not very difficult for supernatural fiction to make us accept the dead, because we usually brush aside that trick and look upon the active ghosts as if they were alive. In Williams the opposite is true; it is the fact that the girls are dead, their hopeless condition, that is most painfully vivid. We participate in their state with an awful shudder because it is not described in windy, otherworld language, but in the plain, factual manner of two mediocre girls lost in the city.

> "Shall we go to our place?"
>
> "No, no. I won't see Mother. I hate Mother."
>
> Lester shrugged. One way or another, they did seem to be rather vagrants, helpless creatures, with no purpose and no use. She said, "Well . . . let's go."

I suppose it is a turn like "rather vagrants" for two young women smashed to pieces by an airplane that identifies Williams' quality.

At the center of the book there is quite a lot of machinery about a villain called Simon the Clerk, who conceives of himself as the true Messiah. None of this is very compelling because the hypnosis and faith healings move us into a world of cranks and freaks which is inadequate to express the solemn evil Williams had in mind. Altogether, Williams is only moderately interesting about the living.

I don't see how anyone could be surprised or annoyed that Plievier's *Stalingrad* has sold over a million copies in Europe. The utilitarian title is an apt representation of the book. It is a solid, intense, horrifying document on the destruction of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad.

Publishers are unforgivably pigheaded in comparing all current war fiction to *War and Peace* and thereby creating enormous resentment in the mind of anyone who has read Tolstoy. It is all one can do to get past the cheeky blurbs and enter the humble pages of the books themselves. Plievier's book, no *War and Peace* indeed, is only a superior kind of journalism, but because of its overwhelming concentration upon the terrible details of the trapped, desperate men, the diseased, frozen German soldiers who have been abandoned like superfluous beasts by the powers in Berlin, the novel has a seriousness and responsibility not achieved by the other war fiction around, which depends solely upon a doughy, progressivist imagination. *Stalingrad* is worth reading as a document and also because one recognizes a humane, cultivated, grave mind at work on the brutal material.

Elizabeth Hardwick

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HISTORY AND LOGIC

THE MEANING OF HUMAN HISTORY. By Morris R. Cohen. La Salle, Illinois: The Open Court Publishing Company. $4.00.

The late Morris R. Cohen was singularly well-qualified by critical intelligence, judicious temper, and enormous learning to clarify the philosophical study of civilization. The present book, part of which was delivered in 1944 as the Sixth Series of the Paul Carus Lectures, is the outcome of years of reading and reflection on the nature of historical change and on the fundamental problems of historical knowledge. It exhibits Cohen's characteristic acuity and sagacity, and communicates the essentials of his general philosophy and of his vision of man's place in the scheme of things. He was a vigorous spokesman for the authority of logic and scientific method in all matters of intellectual concern, a penetrating critic of irresponsible romantic irrationalism, and a valiant champion of a genuinely liberal outlook upon life. Much of the book is indeed a trenchant exposure of intellectual excesses committed by writers on human affairs; and it punctures effectively attitudes toward history which are sentimental, brutally cynical, or sceptical in a wholesale fashion.

Three major theses are clarified and supported by Cohen's analysis. In the first place, though the historian's primary concern is with the singular, the historian cannot escape using universal assumptions about causal dependencies whenever he advances any factual claims. Accordingly, the study of the past must proceed on the supposition that there are objective limiting conditions for historical changes, and the logic of evidence plays as crucial a role in that study as it does in any applied science, such as geology or medicine. The field of history is not a domain in which anything might happen, for most of the possibilities that are logically conceivable are in fact excluded by the actual character of a given historical situation; and while the past may be viewed from alternative perspectives, the validity of any specific causal imputation depends on the presence of objective connections between events. This disposes of views like those of Croce and Beard which deny the possibility of objective causal judgments in historical inquiry.

In the second place, while historical changes illustrate determined orders of happenings, most historical occurrences are determined by a plurality of causal factors that are only contingently conjoined. Those who pretend to explain the past and present in terms of some single factor are confusing what may be a necessary condition for an event with its sufficient conditions; and Cohen shows in connection with

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several such interpretations (his book does not do adequate justice to his knowledge of many others) that though each may illuminate some phase of the historical process, no one taken singly succeeds in accounting for the actual content and development of social institutions. Historical changes do not exhibit an organic unity, and the contingent linkages of determining factors are the ground for alternative possibilities of choice and action. Accordingly, the course of events does not illustrate any inherent dialectic, whether divine or profane, and the historical development of mankind is not an inexorable march toward some predestined end.

And finally, the contemplation of the past reveals the defeat as well as the victory of human ideals, and may thus serve as a basis for a critique of contemporary assumptions both ethical and factual. Cohen rejected as basically immoral Schiller's dictum that world-history is the final court of ethical judgment, for he was keenly sensitive to the unrequited sufferings of mankind and the tragic failures which attend so much noble human effort. Through intelligent action men are able within limits to determine their destinies, but moral excellence is not identical with the ability to survive. Accordingly, a mind that is genuinely liberal will refuse its loyalty to mere force or power, and it will not surrender its birthright of independent critical thought to whatever institutions or agencies happen to be dominant.

However, Cohen was generally more successful in exposing the inadequacies of the ideas of others than in formulating precisely his own conceptions; and in spite of the cogent and often moving eloquence with which he argued for the disciplined use of reason in historical study, he did not escape obscurity in his discussion of many crucial issues. Two examples must suffice for this review. Cohen appears to reject the Humean analysis of the causal relation (though the force of his critique is open to serious doubt), and to advance the counter-claim that events genuinely connected causally possess something "identical" in common and display an element of "logical necessity." Waiving the problem whether the latter contention does not compromise Cohen's thesis that the determining conditions of historical happenings are contingent and plural, the obvious question to be put concerns the specific nature of the alleged identity in causal transactions. For it is almost trivially true that *any* two events, whether causally related or not, share some identical features. And though Cohen supplies a few illustrations of what he means (e.g., he declares that the energy in the sun's rays is identical with the energy by which chlorophyll transforms inorganic into organic compounds), they do not stand up under careful

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scrutiny, and in any case provide no clarified principle of interpretation. Does modern science really maintain that the energy present in a cause is substantially identical with the energy in its effect? Cohen's discussion of historical causation, alas, contributes only another mystery to the mysteries of existence.

Cohen rightly holds that assumptions as to what would have happened if some things had been different, cannot be avoided by the historian who makes causal imputations; and he calls needed attention to the role of the logic of evidence in evaluating the adequacy of such assumptions. However, without an explicit formulation of the principles of that logic—the need for which is one of the most pressing in the social sciences—disagreements between equally competent historians concerning contrary-to-fact hypotheses cannot be reasonably resolved. Yet in this matter Cohen has little definite to offer, except to cite the bare fact that historians do make causal and counter-factual assertions—as if that fact were sufficient to establish the objective validity of the historian's procedure or to enlighten the reader concerned with the rationale of historical method.

Nevertheless, such shortcomings do not impair the suggestiveness and sane wisdom of the present book. Cohen undoubtedly did not possess the path-breaking if erratic originality of a mind like Russell's; he did have the courage to declare what he believed to be the truth, even if because of its obvious and prosaic character that truth obtains no fashionable following. *The Meaning of Human History* deserves a wide circle of readers, not least for its sober and pertinent reminders of what every disciplined intelligence should know but what current intellectual trends and social practice conveniently ignore.

Ernest Nagel

POSSIBILITIES FOR POLITICS

THE NEW MEN OF POWER. By C. Wright Mills. Harcourt, Brace. $3.50.

Has there ever before been a time when American intellecuals felt so dispirited and helpless about politics, so ready to allow their moods to dominate their minds? Not only one or another variety of politics, but the very idea that intellectuals should seek a close and impassioned relationship to politics now seems suspect. Many who once succumbed to

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Stalinism now renounce politics entirely, in both instances because of an inability to draw simple distinctions. Once bitten, twice shy? Perhaps; but not forever shy.

C. Wright Mills has written a book in total opposition to such current inclinations as quietism, ideal-community building, advocacy of "preventive" atomic war, a truce with the right because of fear of Stalinism. From the sociological bulk of his book, an analysis of the current status of American labor leaders, he develops a political program for what might roughly be called the anti-Stalinist left. Very possibly, some readers will find his optative tone the product of an act of will, for his book would indicate that he does not share the extreme pessimism of most radical or once-radical intellectuals. As a result, the book suffers from a certain lack of maneuverability in argumentation and of emotional rapport with its probable audience; but at the same time, we owe him a considerable debt of gratitude for having tried, in a time of depressed silence, to reopen a discussion on politics.

The book is based on an intensive poll of labor leaders, from the results of which Mills constructs a portrait of their views on American society. He contrasts these views with those of the several small, politically alert publics that compete for domination of American politics, and then discusses possible relationships between the labor leaders and these publics in the event of war or economic slump. He is thus able to shuttle between his limited subject and its large implications.

The politically alert publics designated by Mills are worth mentioning, for they may provide usable categories, once subjected to criticism and test, for future discussion. They are: the far left (the Marxist sects): the independent left of homeless radical intellectuals; the rhetoric-ridden but disoriented liberal center; the Stalinists; the largely anachronistic practical conservatives (Taft) "who lean heavily on the standard American success story and the beneficient role of the small businessman" and who yearn for laissez-faire economy, a minimum intervention in foreign matters and punitive measures against labor; and the sophisticated conservatives who envisage a bloc between corporation business and military bureaucracy, with a docile labor leadership as junior partner, in order to establish a garrison state.

At the moment, says Mills, it appears as if the significant political battles are between the practical right and the liberal center, but "behind men's backs" there moves along "the main drift." This, in essence, is the drift to a *stateified* economy, in which the state "becomes the regulator of the national labor force" as well as, in its role as a major purchaser for military and foreign-program needs, a stabilizer of the

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economy. The labor unions, if confined to guerrilla economic action, become increasingly unable to cope with the vast institutional force of state-and-corporation. In this main drift towards the end desired by the sophisticated conservatives, the "labor leader is walking backward into the future."

The above-listed political publics will contend for the support of the presently passive general public in the coming power struggle which Mills foresees. The labor leaders, though now formally committed to the inept liberal center, will then be a strategic elite, for they will be "the only people who lead mass organizations which . . . could organize the people . . . (for) a society more in line with the image of freedom and security common to left tradition." In a crisis, the liberal center and practical conservatives will be edged out, and power will tend to fall to the sophisticated conservatives. Only the anti-Stalinist left will have a program of counter-attraction, but before it can even come to grips with the sophisticated conservatives it will have to learn to handle the Stalinists, attract at least a fraction of the labor leadership and regain some energy and cohesion. "The only possible link beween power and the ideas of the politically alert of the left" is the more militant variety of labor leader, presumably of the Reuther type. To achieve this union of power and intellect, Mills proposes that such labor leaders organize a labor party. But Mills is not too sanguine about the possibilities of such a reformation: the labor leaders are too deeply involved in the status quo ("never has so much depended upon men who are so ill-prepared") and the intellectuals are too tempted by "new and fascinating career chances."

If I were to express any reservations about the programmatic section of Mills' book, it would be with its insufficient attention to some of the complicating problems that attend it. Let me mention a few of these problems.

Mills knows that what is needed is time, a "political interval" before another war during which a labor party might arise and the anti-Stalinist left might come to life. A war in the immediate future would make his analysis largely irrelevant. In the event of an economic slump, however, the "fight against the main drift" could assume large proportions because then the American workers might "modify basically the outlook and alertness of our present labor leadership." But if there is no slump in the 1932 sense, and if instead we have an economy geared to *eventual* war, punitively inflationary, inflicting hidden economic hunger on lower income groups while yet able to provide sufficient employment to forestall acute crisis; if, in short, there is neither war nor slump

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but a blend of both (economically speaking), then what will be the motivating urge toward the kind of political reformation Mills desires? In such an eventuality, there may be time but not "political time."

This problem seems especially acute in view of another. The favored international position of the U.S., its dominant role as chief producer and creditor in the world, allows it a considerable degree of maneuverability *vis-a-vis* the labor movement. Temporarily, there *is* room for it in American capitalist economy, for there are still vice-presidencies to hand out. And for the intellectuals there are not merely "fascinating career chances" but an even more enervating spiritual bureaucratization.

Still another factor that tends to narrow the chances for a new political formation is the tremendous effect Stalinist Russia has on American domestic politics. If the present international crisis drags on as a chronic irritant, it can only make for timidity and hesitation at home. One can argue plausibly that the only way to break large numbers of people in Europe and Asia from Stalinism is to offer in this country some dynamic counter-attraction to its pseudo-radicalism, but how to lodge this idea in the minds of even the more alert sections of the American labor leadership is a problem, indeed.

Perhaps, however, the most serious obstacles to Mills' perspective is the atomization and demoralization of the anti-Stalinist left. The radical intellectuals have lately come to underestimate their powers, limited as those are; I would guess that if there were some kind of regroupment of the anti-Stalinist left (which is, at the moment, not very likely) it might effectively prod certain sections of the labor movement in the direction Mills proposes. The small failures of energy and will in New York have their repercussions in Detroit.

These are genuine difficulties, but it is the very large merit of Mills' book that it provokes one to think of the possibilities for politics in this country. There are no easy, pat answers these days, yet it seems to me that for those who accept the general desirability of Mills' perspective his book is a welcome beginning.

Irving Howe

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THE CASE OF THE CONTENTED REVIEWER

THE right way to give an impression of "THE SKIN OF DREAMS"* is to quote from it, but that is difficult; the best passages are invariably indecent. Mr. Kaplan, moreover, has been singularly felicitous in finding equivalents in our own gutter for the sly argot of M. Queneau.

As a novel it might be described as a mixture of fairy tale and off-color story. Ostensibly it records the progress of Jacques L'Aumône, the misfit son of a French sock manufacturer, as he passes from one failure to another until he winds up as James Charity (an exact translation of his name), the famous Hollywood star. But this is mere surface. Actually the story is a comic vehicle for the author, who having been a surrealist believes that spontaneity is all and desires an opportunity to release his best wit and his best fancy.

M. Queneau is also a specialist in irony. His hero moons nobly after an unapproachable lady for a long time; then he meets an old schoolmate who informs him abruptly that he too has met her and readily possessed her. And when the hero becomes a cinematic personage and his image is flashed on the screen of the Parisian suburb that saw his birth, his old home town does not recognize him.

THE shiftless hero spends much of his early career in Walter Mitty day-dreams of great personal prowess. He plays the ponies and extra parts in pre-sound French movies. He also goes in for trying to improve the breed of lice, to make them larger than they are at present. Later a passion for cheek-turning hits him, and although he is an excellent boxer, he allows himself to be smacked during an encounter in the Paris subway without returning the blow. Of such incidents is his story composed.

Whenever it seems to be scoring a bullseye on a target of meaning, however, it ricochets away. Evasive suggestiveness is its method, and a subtle, complex, affectionate laugh is its reward. It is something like a gentle, bawdy, French popular song, accompanied dead-pan on the accordion. This may not make for vast American popularity, though I for one found more laughs in it than in Evelyn Waugh's recent best-seller, "The Loved One." By comparison Queneau makes Waugh seem overgagged and undergraduate, and his style is tenderly unemphatic rather than tack-sharp and snobbish.

Close observers will detect an indebtedness to James Joyce, particularly in the Gerty MacDowell section of "Ulysses," where romantic novels are parodied. There is also a Joycean cerebrality and secessionism; the author seems to be washing his hands of the troubles of the world. Literary moralists will wonder why an outstanding talent has been compromised by triviality, and straight moralists will scream decadence and shocking egocentricity. Yet it is good to have a Queneau book at last brought to these shores, and Mr. Kaplan's is a very fine translation. Personally, I wonder how it will make out in Boston.

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* (*The above review by Gerald Sykes is reprinted with the permission of the New York* TIMES. *H. J. Kaplan's translation of* "THE SKIN OF DREAMS" *by Raymond Queneau is published at* $1.50 *by New Directions,* 500 *Fifth Avenue, New York* 18, *N. Y.*)

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DOES EXISTENTIALISM STILL EXIST?

Let me explain this question. Is it not true that the discussion of the meaning of existentialism has been dying down? or at any rate is being taken more and more for granted, like cynicism, optimism, surrealism, acoholism, and practically all the other well-known topics of conversation?

If so, this is a dangerous state of affairs. For as soon as a philosophy is taken for granted, as soon as its meaning is assumed, then it begins to be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Philosophical idealism is a good example. It was once just as fashionable as existentialism and is now generally thought to have to do with those impractical people who believe in ideals and never amount to anything.

I propose a revival of interest in the meaning of existentialism because when everyone asks what something means, the possibilities of misunderstanding are, if not lessened, more controllable. Having studied existentialism in an offhand way since 1935, I become more and more convinced that its meaning can be reduced to the following formulation: *Existentialism means that no one else can take a bath for you.*

This example is suggested by Heidegger, who points out that no one else can die for you. You must die your own death. But the same is true of taking a bath. And I prefer the bath as an example to death because, as Heidegger further observes, no one likes to think very much about death, except indigent undertakers perhaps. Death is for most a distant event, however unpleasant and inevitable.

A bath, however, is a daily affair, at least in America. Thus it is something you have to think about somewhat everyday, and while you are thinking about it, and while, perforce, you are taking a bath, you might just as well be thinking about what existentialism means. Otherwise you will probably just be thinking about yourself, which is narcissism; or about other human beings, which is likely to be malicious, unless you are feeling very good; or worst of all, you may not be thinking at all, which is senseless and a waste of time.

Of course, there are other acts which each human being must perform for himself, such as eating, breathing, sleeping, making love, etc. But taking a bath seems to me the best of the lot because it involves the vital existentialist emphasis on choice: you can choose *not* to take a bath, you can waver in your choice, you can finally de-

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cide to take a bath, the whole drama of human freedom can become quite hectic or for that matter quite boring. But eating is hardly a matter of choice, except for the menu itself, nor is breathing which can be done not only without taking thought but while one is quite unconscious. As for making love, taking a bath is a better example because you can keep it clean, simple, free of fixations, perversions, inhibitions, and an overpowering sense of guilt.

Now despite the fact that most of the bathtubs which exist are in America, some Americans are not in the habit of taking baths for granted. I know of one American (formerly an existentialist, by the way) who avoids taking frequent baths because he feels that the taking of a bath is an *extreme situation.* (He is not averse to using existentialist arguments when it suits his purpose, though in company he attacks existentialism). He says that taking a bath is an extreme situation because God knows what may occur to you when you are in the tub, you may decide to drown yourself because existence, as existentialists say, is essentially *absurd;* you may decide to become a narcissist because of the pleasures of the warm and loving water; you may decide to join the Roman Catholic Church because it too is quite comforting and comfortable. But there's no use listing all the catastrophes this fellow thinks may occur to anyone in the extreme situation of taking a bath.

So too with the bathtaking of a close friend of mine, who finds the taking of baths a matter of no little thought. He takes two baths a day, but he has to force himself to do so because there are so many other more important things to do (so it seems to him!) or which he feels he ought to do during the time occupied in taking a bath (note how the question of moral value enters at this point). It is a matter for much thought also because he has to decide whether to take a bath or a shower. He is afraid that sooner of later he will break his neck slipping on a cake of soap while taking a shower (which he prefers to a bath), although, on the other hand, he feels that in some ways it is better to take a shower than a bath because then he does not have to wash out the tub for others (*the others* are always important, as Sartre has observed), and in short the taking of baths is not a simple matter for him. Once I visited him while he

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was taking a shower, and while I was conversing with his wife in their handsome living-room, he kept crying out through the downpour of the shower: "Say, you know it's mighty lonesome in here." He wanted me to visit with him and keep him company (note the *aloneness* of the human situation as depicted by the existentialists), to converse with him. Consequently, after he had shouted his fourth appeal for my company, I had to go in and point out to him that we would have to shout at each other because of the noise of the shower and we shouted at each other often enough for more justifiable reasons.

In the upper class, as is well known, it is customary (I am told by friends who have soared to these circles at times ho, ho!) to take at least two baths a day, while in the lower middle class and working class this is less true, an observation I bring forward to show how important social and economic factors are, or, as the existentialists say, how all being is being-in-the-world, although they seem to think that the social and economic aspects of being-in-the-world are not so important as I am forced to think they are. Of course, some of the existentialists may have changed their minds during the second World War and the recent so-called peace.

The real difficulty in explaining what existentialism means flows from the basis of this philosophy, a basis which can be summarized in the following proposition: *Human beings exist.* They have an existence which is human and thus different from that of stones, trees, animals, cigar store Indians, and numerous human beings who are trying their best not to exist or not to be human.

If you are really human, if you really exist as a human being, you have no need of any explanation of existence or existentialism. In the meantime, the best thing to do is to keep on reading explanations of existentialism and existence.

Delmore Schwartz

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A VIEW OF SIR OSBERT SITWELL

Sir Osbert Sitwell and *Laughter in the Next Room,* the fourth volume of his five-volume memorial to a passing age, have appeared in this country almost simultaneously. In that his autobiography is one of the most highly personal documents since Rousseau's *Confessions,* though without any of its indiscretions, it seemed apropos to turn a projected review of the book into an interview with its author. Sir Osbert, at the moment of writing, has only been in this country just over a week, confined, for part of the time, to his hotel with an attack of that most aristocratic of afflictions—gout. Dazed by the opulence and the speed of life, his impressions of this country, which he has visited only once before (for two months in 1926) are mostly confined to extrasensory and extraterritorial perceptions.

He was born in 1892, the elder son of Sir George and Lady Ida Sitwell, and his family tree stretches its branches into the distances beyond the Norman invasion of England. Behind him he has a family-tradition of several hundred years of blood sports, landed-gentry ideals, and general philistinism, and with it he has engaged, abetted by his sister Edith and his brother Sacheverell, in a relentless battle, using as weapons a passionate dedication to the arts and a scathing contempt for most of what the tradition has stood for. To his mother and father, his aunts and uncles and their circle of friends he was suspect almost from the moment that he could talk—and they to him from the moment that he could form an opinion; and his battle has therefore been a personal as well as a general one. Though he would never be so ill-mannered as to say so, it is probably his greatest satisfaction that he is now far better known as a novelist, poet, essayist, and short-story writer than as the son of his father, for whom his affection as a human being was always in conflict with his dislike for what he represented.

At fifty-six he is a very imposing figure. Tall and slightly stooped, he has a dignity and calm which, at the cost of a cliché, can only be described as Olympian, emphasized by an immobility of face and body that gives the impression of his being clad entirely in armor and helmeted—with the vizor down. His voice is quiet with something of the quality of Strasbourg pâté, his manner disarming; and his humor is much enhanced by an element of surprise engendered by the tranquility of his manner—and muted, it must be added, as far as malice is concerned, by a sense of discretion obviously acquired in the hard school of the literary squabble.

As his opinions about this coun-

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try are not yet sufficiently formed and as his political opinions in general are far outside the majority view of contemporary politics, he only wished to talk of the arts and of writers. Of his own career as a writer he says that he began by being consciously priggish about reading and would tolerate nothing but eighteenth-century writers —particularly Smollett, Fielding and Fanny Burney. On these he proceeded to model himself but soon abandoned the effort in order to search for a more complicated form and a greater simplicity of syntax. Almost the first precept he discovered was to "write with real enjoyment—if what you are writing bores you don't go on; it is bound to bore the reader." His most valuable experience and the one that did most to form him as a writer was the great quantity of journalistic work that he was forced to do in his early life—his father gave him no money and he had to make a living with his pen by writing articles for many London newspapers and magazines. He does not believe that the thought of having a rich father gave him any particular sense of security to aid him in becoming a writer, but he does believe that a small income is almost an essential and that "it is as indecent for a writer to be born without two hundred pounds a year as to be born without arms or legs." This he qualifies by say-

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ing that "it is really lack of talent and not lack of money that prevents people from writing."

A second indispensable precept that he discovered early in life was that "the first thing for a writer to do is to get rid of his father and mother." This he did by creating, for the deception of his family, an imaginary yacht and taking off on endless fictitious cruises, while actually living quietly in a hotel in a small Italian town with his brother. Here he began to discover that his gift of great physical vitality—he is never depressed for more than forty-eight hours at a stretch—was invaluable to him as a writer; he also learned that, while by nature and unbringing he was both accustomed and predisposed to beautiful surroundings, he could work under almost any circumstances.

From the moment that he began to write seriously, he deliberately cultivated the maximum versatility and as much wit and fun as he could use without endangering the content of his work—all this in deliberate opposition to the stuffy middle-class pretentiousness and Bloomsbury clique-forming which he felt were draining the life from the English literature of the time. When accused of frivolity he comforted himself with the thought of Voltaire who was, he thinks, an "essentially frivolous man" waging war on the bogus in a way similar to his own. His own work, he believes, has developed steadily from his first successful novel *Before the Bombardment* through poetry, essays, and travel books to its culmination in his autobiography. He chose the latter form for his major work because he could use his talents as a novelist to describe his vast and varied circle of friends and acquaintances, and as a social historian to record the shifting social scenes that he has lived through.

About contemporary artistic activity in England he is not immediately optimistic. The conditions for young writers are very discouraging: there is no paper and publishers use most of what they have for established successes; the

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National Service Act (more drastic than our peace-time draft) hangs over the head of every young man, and then there is a general feeling of depression and a chronic exhaustion that are not conducive to good work. In general, he considers that Gilbert and Sullivan have done a permanent disservice to English humor, and that Kafka "the herald of the depressed age" has had a disastrous effect on several writers whom he "could name but won't . . . " He finds Dylan Thomas and George Barker the best of the younger poets, and William Sansom and P. H. Newby (with his "fantastic sense of atmosphere") the best of the younger prose writers. Of the artists he particularly admires Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland and John Piper, and of the musicians William Walton, Benjamin Britten, Michael Tippett, and Alan Rawsthorne. The most immediate danger to the future of the arts in England is the tremendous economic pressure on the artist caused by the increased cost of living and enormous taxation bringing with it the gradual disappearance of the patron class, and an almost inevitable drag away from individual creative work towards such State Institutions as the B.B.C., where creative talent is likely to be blighted. Nowadays the English artist is "compelled to sell himself for—oh, at any rate . . . for a mess."

America is "the only country in the world, outside Europe, to produce writers of world scope," and his admiration for Melville, Whitman, T. S. Eliot ("he epitomizes an age") and Henry James is unbounded—though of the latter he finds that he wrote "a great deal of piffle about English country houses by which he was much too impressed." The present-day writers he most admires here are Faulkner ("but what gets in his way is his style") and Henry Miller, whose powers of imagination and tremendous vitality compensate for his defects. The best poets, he thinks, are Marianne Moore, E. E. Cummings, and John Crowe Ransom, "who has the rare gift of a vocabulary almost as precise as

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that of Keats." The younger writers and poets he has had no chance of reading in austerity-England, where foreign books are almost last on the import priority list. Our chief disservice to the arts has been that "America started the idea that it is wrong to do no work and abolished leisure and the leisure class, or at least their sense of ease," arousing guilt feelings in artists not working in the conventionally accepted sense and driving potential patrons of the individual toward institutionalized and, therefore, disastrous forms of patronage. He does not put much credence, however, in the common complaint that talent is being ground down in the mill of American commercial journalism—"at least the rewards in this country are large enough to allow for periods of leisure and if you have enough talent you write yourself out of journalism anyhow." The future of the arts in America seems hopeful to him because, as against Europe, this is a country secure economically and politically, with a fantastic degree of vitality, an appreciable and growing public for good work and "much blood that has not been tapped for the arts—the great thing if you're to be an artist." "Poor Aldous," he finished up on this tack, "with all those Huxleys behind and around him."

To him the most surprising aspect of his career has been that he has continually been accused of "spitting on the public" while to his own mind he has done nothing but epitomize the typically English attitude of poking fun at the worst aspects of the structure on which English culture and security rest. His latest work is a long poem entitled *Demos the Emperor,* not yet published, in which he shows himself to be by no means discouraged in his gadfly activities. It is a beautifully phrased and trenchant attack on contemporary standards as he sees them. Whatever one's personal assessment of his judgments may be, it is impossible not to admire a man who, both in his work and in his personal life, has fought so hard and with such pleasing results for standards above the common.

Anthony Bower

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Sirs:

I hope Mr. Warshow's unjust review of Parker Tyler's *Chaplin, Last of the Clowns* in the October PR will not discourage the reading of this brilliant book. The reader of the review would not suspect that the book has a thesis, that it is a probing work which explores the relations of Chaplin and Charlie in a delicate, imaginative way, that it is rich in fine observations, and contains some beautiful, stirring pages of pure enthusiasm rare in writings on film. I don't know of another book on a film artist that comes up to it in quality. The psychoanalytic details that Mr. Warshow isolates in order to justify his dismissing the book are a very small part of the whole and hardly represent its broad insight and method. In themselves, and especially when torn out of context, these details indicate nothing about the truth or falsity of Tyler's interpretation of Chaplin and might occur in Freud. It should be said, however, that the crudity of statement in the episode of the flag is not Tyler's but the reviewer's—I do not find in the book the vulva and penis on which Mr. Warshow is pleased to insist.

Meyer Schapiro

REPLY

Sirs:

I know, of course, that Mr. Tyler's book has numerous admirers, and it is interesting to learn what virtues Mr. Schapiro has found in it. (However, I am not sure I should consider "pure enthusiasm" a virtue.)

The "crudity" of naming the penis and the vulva is indeed mine. Mr. Tyler expresses his idea perhaps more delicately: "Are the stars and stripes . . . . not also substantive for *a bed?* . . . . What would the *star* alone be, what the straight-shooting *stripe?*" (The italics are Mr. Tyler's.)

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INDEX TO VOLUME XV (1948)

	Issue	Page
ARENDT, HANNAH		
The Concentration Camps	7	743
ARVIN, NEWTON		
Counterfeit Presentments	6	673
BARRETT, WILLIAM		
(br) Monsieur Teste. By Paul Valéry	2	249
(br) André Gide. By Van Meter Ames	4	503
(br) The Classical Moment. By Martin Turnell	12	1341
BELLOW, SAUL		
Spanish Letter	2	217
BENNETT, PEGGY		
The Pawn (story)	8	898
BERRYMAN, JOHN		
New Year's Eve (poem)	4	456
Narcissus Moving (poem)	4	458
The Long Home (poem)	5	545
The State of American Writing (symposium)	8	856
(br) Poetry Chronicle	2	254
(br) The Last of the Provincials. By Maxwell Geismar	3	379
(br) T. S. Eliot: A Selected Critique. Leonard Unger, ed.	7	826
BISHOP, ELIZABETH		
Over 2,000 Illustrations (poem)	6	631
BLACKMUR, R. P.		
The State of American Writing (symposium)	8	861
BOWEN, ELIZABETH		
The Creative Life in Our Time	11	1175
BOWER, ANTHONY		
A View of Sir Osbert Sitwell	12	1364
BOWLES, PAUL		
Under the Sky (story)	3	305
BRANTLEY, FREDRICK		
A Distant Victory (story)	7	794
BROYARD, ANATOLE		
A Portrait of the Hipster	6	721
BUCKMAN, GERTRUDE		
(br) Lions and Shadows. By Christopher Isherwood	4	504
BURFORD, WILLIAM		
Cedar of Cedars (poem)	12	1307
BURNHAM, JAMES		
The Double Crisis (dialogue)	4	407
(br) Toward World Peace. By Henry A. Wallace	6	701
(br) The Extreme and the Plausible	9	1020
CHASE, RICHARD		
Dissent on Billy Budd	11	1212

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

	Issue	Page
CHIAROMONTE, NICOLA		
The Jesuit	2	192
Malraux and the Demons of Action (I)	7	776
Malraux and the Demons of Action (II)	8	912
Paris Letter	9	1007
Albert Camus and Moderation	10	1142
(br) Europe Without Baedeker. By Edmund Wilson	2	245
CLAIR, LOUIS		
French Periodicals (review)	5	605
CLARK, ELEANOR		
The Heart of the Afternoon (story)	12	1332
COCTEAU, JEAN		
The Human Voice: A One-Act Play	7	764
DARIO, RUBEN		
Melancholia (poem)	12	1310
DAVIS, ROBERT GORHAM		
The State of American Writing (symposium)	8	866
(br) The Living Novel. By V. S. Pritchett	1	127
(br) The Armed Vision. By Stanley Edgar Hyman	7	828
(br) James Joyce: Two Decades of Criticism. Seon Givens, ed.	9	1015
(br) Pound, Jeffers, and Others	11	1219
DUPEE, F. W.		
(br) The Journals of André Gide. Vol. I.	1	100
(br) Hamlet. With a psycho-analytical study by Ernest Jones, M.D.	10	1136
ELLMANN, RICHARD		
Aleister Crowley Versus W. B. Yeats	9	1049
ELTON, WILLIAM		
(br) Poetry Chronicle	5	598
FIEDLER, LESLIE A.		
The Teeth (story)	1	48
Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!	6	664
The State of American Writing (symposium)	8	870
(br) Poetry Chronicle	3	381
(br) Some Uses and Failures of Feeling	8	924
FLINT, R. W.		
Fiat Luce!	11	1250
FRANK, JOSEPH		
(br) The Dehumanization of Art. By José Ortega y Gasset	12	1346
GERSHENZON, M. O.		
A Correspondence Between Two Corners	9	951
GIBSON, WILLIAM		
Letters to My Witch (poem)	1	42
Tobias' Prayer (poem)	10	1102
GIDE, ANDRE		
Theseus (novelette)	11	1159
GREENBERG, CLEMENT		
The State of American Writing (symposium)	8	876
Art Chronicle	1	81
Art Chronicle	3	366
Art Chronicle	4	481

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

	Issue	Page
GREENBERG, CLEMENT, cont'd.		
Art Chronicle	5	573
Art Chronicle	7	812
Reply to George L. K. Morris	6	685
GREENBERG, MARTIN		
(br) The Question of German Guilt. By Karl Jaspers	5	601
(br) Mechanization Takes Command. By Siegfried Giedion	7	834
GREENE, GRAHAM		
The Creative Life in Our Time	11	1175
GREGORY, HORACE		
The Beggar on the Beach (poem)	8	895
In George Sand's Garden (poem)	11	1192
(br) Two Quiet Lives. By David Cecil	5	596
HANDLIN, OSCAR		
(br) Henry Wallace: The Man and the Myth. By Dwight MacDonald	4	499
HARDWICK, ELIZABETH		
Evenings at Home (story)	4	439
(br) Fiction Chronicle	1	108
(br) Much Outcry; Little Outcome	3	374
(br) Fiction Chronicle	6	705
(br) The Heart of the Matter. By Graham Greene	8	937
(br) Intruder in the Dust. By William Faulkner	10	1130
(br) Fiction Chronicle	12	1351
HAUSER, ARNOLD		
Can Movies Be "Profound"?	1	69
HAWKINS, LESTER		
Sullivan's Interpersonal Psychology	10	1071
HEPPENSTAL, RAYNER		
Two Novels by Léon Bloy	2	177
HERBST, JOSEPHINE		
Miss Porter and Miss Stein	5	568
HERSCHBERGER, RUTH		
Poem	12	1309
HIVNOR, MARY OTIS		
Barrault and Artaud	3	332
HOLMES, CLELLON		
Frau Von Stein, My Brother's Keeper (poem)	5	548
HOOK, SIDNEY		
On Historical Understanding	2	231
Mr. Toynbee's City of God	6	691
HOWE, IRVING		
The Sentimental Fellow-Traveling of F. O. Matthiessen	10	1125
(br) The Sherwood Anderson Reader	4	492
(br) A Study of Literature for Readers and Critics. By David Daiches	9	1024
(br) The New Men of Power. By C. Wright Mills	12	1356
IVANOV, V. I.		
A Correspondence Between Two Corners	9	951
JARRELL, RANDALL		
Money (poem)	1	45

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
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	Issue	Page
JONES, FRANK		
New Roads, New Routes, New Lines of Goods	3	348
(br) Remember to Remember. By Henry Miller	1	117
(br) Well-Intentioned / Well-Equipped	5	587
KALLMAN, CHESTER		
Storm at Castelfranco (poem)	3	339
KAPLAN, HAROLD		
Captain Conscience (poem)	8	896
KAZIN, ALFRED		
From an Italian Journal	5	550
KECSKEMETI, PAUL		
(br) Dreadful Freedom. By Marjorie Grene	5	593
KEES, WELDON		
Muskrat Ramble: Popular and Unpopular Music	5	614
The Lives (poem)	8	894
KOESTLER, ARTHUR		
London Letter	1	32
LASKY, MELVIN J.		
Berlin Letter	1	60
Berlin Letter	4	485
LEIBOWITZ, RENE		
Two Composers: A Letter From Hollywood	3	361
LIST, KURT		
Music Chronicle	1	85
Music Chronicle	7	822
McCARTHY, MARY		
The Cicerone (story)	2	151
Theater Chronicle	1	74
Theater Chronicle	3	357
Theater Chronicle	4	477
McGEHEE, EDWARD		
A Pageant Out of Midnight (poem)	3	342
MALRAUX, ANDRE		
The Double Crisis (dialogue)	4	407
MATTHEWS, JACKSON		
(br) Reflections on the World Today. By Paul Valéry	7	831
MATTICK, PAUL		
Obsessions of Berlin	10	1108
MENCKEN, H. L.		
The State of American Writing (symposium)	8	893
(br) The American College Dictionary	3	371
MEYERHOFF, HANS		
Mr. Eliot's Evening Service	1	131
The Juenger Case	3	343
A Parable of Simple Humanity	9	966
MORRIS, GEORGE L. K.		
On Critics and Greenberg	6	681
NABOKOV, NICOLAS		
The Atonal Trail	5	580

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

	Issue	Page
NAGEL, ERNEST		
(br) Science and Idealism. By Maurice Conforth	6	711
(br) The Meaning of Human History. By Morris R. Cohen	12	1354
PHILLIPS, WILLIAM		
The Politics of Desperation	4	449
PRAZ, MARIO		
Hemingway in Italy	10	1086
PRITCHETT, V. S.		
The Future of English Fiction	10	1063
The Creative Life in Our Time: An Exchange of Letters	11	1175
PROUST, MARCEL		
Filial Sentiments of a Parricide	1	91
RAHV, PHILIP		
Disillusionment and Partial Answers	5	519
RANSOM, JOHN CROWE		
The State of American Writing (symposium)	8	879
RASUMOVSKY, ALEXANDER		
The Soviet Literary Purge	3	323
RAVA, RENZO		
The Useful Life of a Dead Man	10	1103
RICHMAN, ROBERT		
Love Is Not, Love Is (poem)	9	972
ROSENFELD, ISAAC		
Three Parables and a Dissertation	6	654
(br) Tell the West. By Jerzy Gliksman	8	932
ROSENTHAL, HENRY M.		
The Religious Novel and the Detective Story	7	839
S. T. (initials)		
The Morale of the Red Army in Germany	3	297
SARTRE, JEAN-PAUL		
What Is Writing?	1	9
For Whom Does One Write? (I)	3	313
For Whom Does One Write? (II)	5	536
Literature in Our Time	6	634
SCHIMANSKI, STEFAN		
On Meeting a Philosopher	4	506
SCHWARTZ, DELMORE		
The World Is a Wedding (story)	3	279
Does Existentialism Still Exist?	12	1361
(br) Hart Crane. By Brom Weber	10	1135
SLATER, HUMPHREY		
London Letter	7	807
SPENDER, STEPHEN		
Madonna (poem)	6	672
The Life of Literature (I)	11	1194
The Life of Literature (II)	12	1311
STAFFORD, JEAN		
The Bleeding Heart (story)	9	974
STEVENS, WALLACE		
The State of American Writing (symposium)	8	884

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	Issue	Page
SWEENEY, JAMES JOHNSON		
Joan Miro: Comment and Interview	2	206
SYPHER, WYLIE		
(br) The Middle of the Journey. By Lionel Trilling	1	123
TATE, ALLEN		
The Eye (poem)	1	40
TRILLING, LIONEL		
Sex and Science: The Kinsey Report	4	460
The Repressive Impulse	6	717
The State of American Writing (symposium)	8	886
Art and Fortune	12	1271
(br) The Times of Melville and Whitman. By Van Wyck Brooks	1	105
TROY, WILLIAM		
(br) The Notebooks of Henry James	3	377
VALERY, PAUL		
The Angel (poem)	11	1190
VANNIER, JEAN		
A Century's Balance Sheet	3	288
VITTORINI, ELIO		
An Episode from "In Sicily"	5	530
WALL, BERNARD		
Questions of Language	9	997
WARSHOW, ROBERT		
The Gangster as Tragic Hero	2	240
Film Chronicle	7	816
Film Chronicle	12	1336
(br) The Art of the Film	10	1139
WATKINS, VERNON		
Atlas on Grass (poem)	3	296
The Windows of Breath (poem)	7	790
Stone Footing (poem)	9	973
WILBUR, RICHARD		
Pity (poem)	5	549
WILLIAMS, TENNESSEE		
Rubio y Morena (story)	12	1293
WILLIAMS, WILLIAM CARLOS		
From "Paterson: Book II" (poem)	2	213
The Testament of Perpetual Change (poem)	10	1101
The Lion (poem)	12	1308
YAMAMOTO, HISAYE		
The High-Heeled Shoes (story)	10	1079

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